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An examination of the reasons why parents send their daughters to specific, independent, non-Catholic schools for their secondary education in Western Australia

Lois A. Joll
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**AN EXAMINATION OF THE REASONS WHY PARENTS
SEND THEIR DAUGHTERS TO SPECIFIC, INDEPENDENT,
NON-CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FOR THEIR SECONDARY
EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.**

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(University of W A



A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the
School of Education, Western Australian College of Advanced
Education.

November, 1989

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the reasons why parents send their daughters to specific, independent, non-Catholic schools for their secondary education in Perth, Western Australia. Initially, through a review of related literature, variables which might influence parental choice of a private school were identified. In order to establish the relevance of these variables, and to identify any other previously unidentified variables which may influence parental selection of a particular independent girls' school, a survey was undertaken of sample groups of parents whose daughters had entered Year 8 in 1989. Further data was obtained through interviews of a small number of parents from each of the five schools in the study.

Analysis of the data was undertaken through consideration of the percentage frequency of responses to statements with Likert scale response fields; cross tabulation of responses with background data supplied by the parents; factor analysis and canonical variate analysis. The latter analyses established that there were several important influences on choice which were common to all schools and some elements which distinguished between schools. The common factors included: a desire for a well-rounded education, a caring environment, a desire for good communication between the school and home, firm discipline, a strong academic programme, a competent teaching staff and a good reputation, although the importance of these

variables varied between schools. The variables which were of special importance in parental choice of a particular school included family tradition, distance between the home and the particular school and location with respect to an independent boys' school.

This research identified a group of variables which influence parental choice of independent, non-Catholic girls' schools in Western Australia. The nature of the variables indicates that, overall, parents are seeking an education for their daughters which combines a strong academic programme with opportunities for a variety of enriching educational experiences in a caring environment.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

Lois Anne Joll

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr Norm Hyde for acting as my supervisor for this study, Dr Murray Print for his initial guidance in establishing the research programme and Dr Sybe Jongling and Dr Nick Caputi for their assistance with the analysis of the research results. I also wish to thank the principals and parents of the participating schools for their assistance and co-operation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
DECLARATION	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
 CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Overview.	1
1.2 Background.	1
1.3 An Initial Framework for the Study.	3
1.4 The Research Focus.	3
1.5 Boundaries of the Study.	4
1.6 Significance of the Study.	4
1.7 Structure of the Research Report.	5
 CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	 6
2.1 Introduction.	6
2.2 International Studies.	7
2.3 Australian Studies.	12
2.3.1 Disillusionment with the government system.	12
2.3.2 Increased government funding.	15
2.3.3 Nature of the parent group.	16
2.3.4 Common factors of choice.	18
2.3.4.1 Discipline.	19
2.3.4.2 Christian attitudes - moral values.	21
2.3.4.3 Academic excellence.	22

2.3.4.4	Caring environment	
	-individual attention.	23
2.3.4.5	Family tradition.	24
2.3.4.6	Quality of staff.	25
2.3.5	Single-sex education.	25
2.3.6	Growth of the private sector.	27
2.4	Significance of the review.	29
2.5	Conclusion	29

CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH

	QUESTIONS	30
3.1	Overview.	30
3.2	An initial conceptual framework.	31
3.3	Intervening and antecedent variables.	35
3.3.1	Discipline.	35
3.3.2	Christian ethos.	35
3.3.3	High standard of academic programme.	36
3.3.4	Well-rounded education.	37
3.3.5	Family tradition.	37
3.3.6	Caring environment.	39
3.3.7	Quality of teaching staff.	39
3.3.8	Non-academic courses and extra-curricular activities.	40
3.3.9	Physical features.	41
3.3.10	Good reputation.	42
3.3.11	Distance.	42
3.4	Extraneous variables.	43
3.5	Summary.	43

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH DESIGN	44
4.1 Overview.	44
4.2 Data sources and location of samples.	45
4.3 Data collection.	46
4.3.1 The survey.	46
4.3.1.1 Development and trialling of the survey.	46
4.3.1.2 Construction.	47
4.3.1.3 Gaining access to schools and parents.	49
4.3.1.4 Parent sample.	50
4.3.1.5 Administration of the survey.	51
4.4.1 Interviews.	52
4.6 Data analysis.	53
4.7 Ethical issues.	58
4.8 Problems encountered.	59
4.9 Concluding statement.	60
CHAPTER 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS	61
5.1 Overview.	61
5.2 Background information.	62
5.2.1 Relationship of respondent to the student.	62
5.2.2 Educational background of the parents.	62
5.2.3 Family composition and location.	64
5.2.4 Booking procedure and inspection of schools.	65
5.2.5 Impact of fees.	70

5.2.6	The most important decision maker.	72
5.3	Responses relating to the inventory of statements on possible influences on choice.	74
5.3.1	Close proximity to the school being a major consideration in choice of school.	74
5.3.2	Family connection being an important consideration.	77
5.3.3	The school being recognized as having a good reputation.	78
5.3.4	The size of the school population not being a significant factor.	79
5.3.5	The importance of observing student behaviour in the community.	81
5.3.6	The physical appearance of the school being unimportant.	83
5.3.7	Perceptions as to whether the school was well endowed with physical resources such as library, computers etc.	84
5.3.8	The importance of good communication channels between the parent and the school.	86
5.3.9	The appearance of the uniform not affecting the decision to choose a particular school.	88
5.3.10	Evidence of a Christian spirit within the school being very important.	89
5.3.11	Evidence of caring for the emotional well-being of the student as being significant.	91

5.3.12 Evidence of firm discipline and an expectation of good behaviour being important.	93
5.3.13 Evidence of a strong academic programme being an important factor.	94
5.3.14 The prominent role of music being a significant factor.	99
5.3.15 The prominent role of the creative arts in the school was not significant.	100
5.3.16 The reputation of the school for sporting achievement being an important consideration.	102
5.3.17 An awareness of a competent teaching staff being important.	104
5.3.18 Attitudes towards evidence of small class sizes being an important consideration.	106
5.3.19 Attitudes towards the school's reputation for providing a well-rounded education being important.	108
5.3.20 Whether the daughter's views did not influence the decision.	109
5.3.21 The school being recommended by someone whose opinion was valued.	110
5.3.22 The location of the school, in relation to an independent boys' school, influencing the decision.	113
5.4 Summary of the Likert scale responses to the inventory of statements.	114
5.5 Academic priorities.	117

5.6	The factors which most influenced the choice of a particular school.	119
5.7	Further comments.	122
5.8	Cross tabulation of the background data with the Likert scale responses to items in the inventory.	125
5.9	Factor analysis of items with Likert scale responses.	129
5.10	Canonical variate analysis of items with Likert scale responses.	133
5.11	Concluding statement.	138
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS		139
6.1	Overview.	139
6.2	Significant influences upon choice of a private school.	139
6.2.1	Well-rounded education.	139
6.2.2	Caring environment.	141
6.2.3	Good communication.	143
6.2.4	Discipline.	144
6.2.5	High standard of academic programme.	146
6.2.6	Quality of staff.	149
6.2.7	Good reputation.	151
6.3	Significant influences on the choice of a particular private school.	153
6.3.1	Distance.	153
6.3.2	Family tradition.	155
6.3.3	Boarding facilities.	157
6.3.4	Size of the school population.	158

6.3.5	Single-sex education.	160
6.3.6	Christian ethos.	161
6.3.7	Distance in relation to a boys' school	162
6.3.8	"Tone".	163
6.3.9	Non-academic courses and extra-curricular activities.	164
6.4	Insignificant influences on choice of school.	166
6.4.1	Physical features.	166
6.4.1.1	Class size.	166
6.4.1.2	Appearance.	166
6.4.1.3	Uniform.	166
6.4.1.4	Nature of resources.	167
6.5	Factors of choice.	169
6.6	Concluding statement.	170
CHAPTER 7.	CONCLUSIONS	172
7.1	Overview.	172
7.2	Factors identified in the literature.	172
7.2.1	Discipline.	173
7.2.2	Academic standard.	173
7.2.3	Caring environment.	174
7.2.4	Family tradition.	174
7.2.5	Quality of staff.	174
7.2.6	Christian ethos.	175
7.3	Common factors emerging from the study.	175
7.3.1	A well-rounded education.	175
7.3.2	Good communication.	175
7.3.3	Good reputation.	176

7.4	Specific factors identified in the research but not common to all schools.	176
7.4.1	Distance.	176
7.4.2	Size of school.	177
7.4.3	Boarding facilities.	177
7.4.4	The principal.	178
7.4.5	Closeness to a boys' school.	178
7.4.6	"Tone".	178
7.4.7	Music.	179
7.4.8	Daughter's desire to attend a particular school.	179
7.5	Concluding statement.	180
REFERENCES		181
APPENDICES		
	Appendix 1.	186
	Appendix 2.	188
	Appendix 3.	194
	Appendix 4.	195

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE NO.</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	
2.1	Ranked factors relating to parental selection of private schools.	20
5.1	Number of surveys sent and the returns from each school.	61
5.2	Mean agreement/disagreement scores for items in the inventory of statements.	115
5.3	Rank order of agreement/disagreement scores for items in the inventory of statements (Top 5 ranked items).	116
5.4	Accumulated scores for academic priorities in choice of school.	118
5.5	Accumulated scores for overall priorities in choice of school.	120
5.6	Top four overall priorities in rank order.	121
5.7	Categorized comments in response to Item 26.	123

<u>TABLE NO.</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	
5.8	Mean agreement/disagreement scores for the Likert scale responses to Items 21, 13, 6 & 1 by background category.	126
5.9	Variance explained by the first eight factors (i.e. factors with eigenvalues >1).	130
5.10	Factor loadings for variables in factor 1 after varimax rotation.	131
5.11	Top seven ranked variables associated with factor 1.	132
5.12	Variance explained by the four canonical variates.	133
5.13	Class means for canonical variates 1 and 2.	134
5.14	Standardized canonical coefficients for canonical variates 1 and 2.	134
5.15	Interpretation of the nature of the first five variables of canonical variates 1 and 2 for schools with high positive canonical variate scores.	137

<u>TABLE NO.</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	
6.1	Items of particular importance in parental selection of specific schools.	170

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE NO.</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	
3.1	Variables and their interaction with parent choice.	32
3.2	Intervening and antecedent variables and their relationship to parent choice.	34
5.1	Scattergram of the class means for canonical variates 1 and 2.	135

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.	Copy of the letter to the principals requesting involvement and co-operation in the survey.	186
Appendix 2.	Copy of the survey.	188
Appendix 3.	Guide questions used during the interviews.	194
Appendix 4.	Specimen transcripts of four interviews.	195

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

This study is concerned with the factors that influence parents' choice of independent, single-sex, non-Catholic schools for their daughters' secondary education. As such, the study addresses the issues of why some parents select one school from a number of schools and the extent to which these choices are based upon personal expectations, market forces, perceived academic standard or other factors.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The current drift of secondary school students from the government to the private system of education has received a great deal of publicity. Brandreth and Thornton (1989) reported that the number of full-time students enrolled in private schools in Western Australia increased by 4.1% between 1981 and 1987, while there was no growth in the government sector over the same period. Although this drift might suggest that private girls' schools are in a strong market position, the growth in number and variety of private co-educational schools in the outer suburbs has created a competitive market situation for the more established, traditional private schools. The new schools are also low resource schools, which attract a significant amount of Federal Government funding leading to a fee

structure which is approximately half of the amount charged by the more established schools.

Evidence of growing competition between the independent schools (both the new co-educational, low-resource schools and the older single-sex girls' schools) is to be seen in the appointment of Development Officers to four of the six independent, non-Catholic girls' schools in Perth in the past two years. The role of these individuals is to publicize the schools to the wider community and is an indication of a more competitive and consumer-orientated trend. The development of a more competitive market for the independent schools suggests that it would be crucial for the executives of these schools to have an understanding of the factors which influence parents in their choice of school.

Until now, however, little attention has been paid to identifying the perceptions which parents have about the various private schools or the factors which affect their choices. This study was designed to identify and examine the reasons why some parents in Western Australia choose particular independent, non-Catholic schools for their daughters' secondary education. On the assumption that the private educational sector is governed to some degree by market forces, these data would be of great value to school administrators in seeking to meet the expectations of the parent population.

1.3 AN INITIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

The initial conceptual framework for the study was based on an examination of the relevant literature and the researcher's own deductions. This framework was then used to generate the research questions. Primary data were obtained through a survey of between 40 and 60 parents in each of five participating schools. Supplementary information was derived from interviews of three parents from each of the schools. The importance of the factors identified from the literature and the researcher's deductions were tested using Likert scale responses to an inventory of statements in the survey, while factors not initially identified were elicited through the use of open-ended items in both the survey and the interviews.

1.4 THE RESEARCH FOCUS

The generic question underpinning the study is:

What are the factors that influence parents' decisions to select one particular, non-Catholic, independent school for their daughter's secondary education in Western Australia?

In seeking to identify the most significant factors, the researcher generated a number of specific research questions. These are presented in Chapter 3 within the context of an initial conceptual framework. These research questions evolved from an examination of the factors

identified in the reading of related literature and from the researcher's own assumptions and pre-suppositions.

1.5 BOUNDARIES OF THE STUDY

The study examined the reasons for parents' choice of a particular, independent, non-Catholic girls' schools in Perth. The sample group selected for study was parents of new Year 8 students. This group was selected because it was considered to best represent parents who are most likely to have actively examined the schools before enrolling their daughter and who would have done so most recently. Parents of students entering Year 8 from the primary section of the school were not surveyed, as it was considered that these parents may have chosen the school initially for reasons which may not be related to the school's secondary education programme.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is the first analysis of the factors perceived by parents as being important in selecting between independent girls' schools in Perth. The research findings will permit school administrators and planners to see how the school is viewed by their clients and to determine the factors underlying the selection of the school. Given the interest and co-operation of the principals in the conduct of the

survey, it is clear that there is a demand for this information.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature while Chapter 3 presents an initial conceptual framework from which the research questions were generated. The methods utilized in the study are described in Chapter 4 and the results presented in Chapter 5. The significance of the results and their relationships to other studies are discussed in Chapter 6. The conclusions arising from the study are presented in Chapter 7. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (3rd Ed., 1984) was used as a general style guide, with some variations from the journal-oriented instructions where necessary to fit the requirements of a thesis.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In coming to a decision to send their daughter to a private school, do parents focus their attention on the respective merits of a government or private secondary school and, once having opted for the private system, do they merely choose the closest school geographically or do they "shop around"? If the latter is true, what are the factors which are most significant in making a choice between schools which, on the surface, may seem to be very similar?

The purpose of this study is to examine the work of other researchers and to consider the extent to which their findings can assist in answering this question. As well, it aims to assist in identifying factors which could provide the basis for a survey of parents of new students in non-Catholic, independent girls' schools in Perth to ascertain the reasons for their choice of a particular school.

This literature review was undertaken with the assistance of a computer search for any relevant publications, both Australian and international. However, the majority of relevant material concerned the Australian situation. The literature came from a range of sources, but was restricted to post-1972 because of the limited relevance of previous studies. The materials were drawn largely from journal

articles, unpublished theses, publications of the National Council of Independent Schools Conferences, local newspaper items and selected texts.

2.2 INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

In considering studies undertaken outside Australia there is a need to be cautious about drawing comparisons because of differences in culture, religions and governments, as well as possible unique local conditions. Mason (1985) conducted an extensive study of the education systems of both Europe and North America. He stressed that although the basic freedom to choose between government and private systems was firmly entrenched in most Western countries, there were many subtle differences between them in respect of the levels of government funding, importance of religion, degree of central control and varying constitutional rights. Thus, although studies such as those undertaken by Krushaar (1972), of 18,000 non-government schools in the United States, and by Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1981), comparing government and non-government schools in the United States, are of interest because they suggest possible areas of common ground, there is a need to be cautious about assuming that their results can be generalized to the Australian scene.

Of interest in the findings of these two studies by Krushaar (1972) and Coleman et al. (1981) were the conclusions reached that parents felt that they had more

control over their children's education in the private system because, as fee-paying parents, the school authority was more likely to be prepared to listen to their wishes than would be the case in the government system.

Kraushaar (1972) highlighted this basic difference between the two systems, which underpins any discussion about choice of school. Other issues of strong interest to parents included religious education, values, attitudes and customs which are reflected in the home and an environment which was perceived as free of drugs and provided firm discipline. He also found that there was little importance placed on tradition, as many fathers had experienced a government school education and yet chose the private system for their offspring (Kraushaar, 1972, p.95).

Coleman et al. did not focus attention in their study specifically on parents; rather they surveyed students and administrators in both government and private schools. They found that the private system was seen to provide a more disciplined atmosphere and that academic results were generally better (Coleman et al., 1981, pp.12-15).

Morrison (1983), in reviewing literature relevant to this topic, made mention of several other studies undertaken in the United States. In particular he drew attention to the findings of Gratiot (1979), Frechtling (1981) and Shephard (1977). Gratiot explored the factors responsible for parents in Seattle withdrawing their children from the public school system. He surveyed the parents of both

public and private school students and concluded that private school parents were more negative towards government schools than were government school parents. Strong differences between the two types of schools were felt to exist in the areas of discipline and ordered environment (Morrison, 1983, p.89).

The studies undertaken by Frechtling (1981) and Shephard (1977) both revealed that parents' concerns in withdrawing their children from the public sector of education centred around discipline, religion and class size as well as academic standards (Morrison, 1983, p.89). A further study undertaken by Kamin and Erickson in 1981 and cited by Morrison (1983) examined the choice process of parents in British Columbia. Parents in the upper-middle socio-economic classes were found to consult their children more often than those from the lower-middle classes. The study highlighted the importance of opinions of friends and the value of the information provided by the school in influencing the choice (Morrison, 1985, p.93). The findings of the study reflected those cited above and showed again that the desire for religion, discipline and academic excellence were important factors in influencing choice of school.

In seeking some recent literature specifically related to parent choice in the British private school system a computer search of the British Education Index was undertaken. As a result, 17 articles post-1980 were revealed but a review of these articles established that

they were not concerned with the private or "public" system of education but rather with a change in the Education Act of 1980 which made it possible for parents to choose their own Local Education Authority (L.E.A.) school if numbers allowed. The majority of the articles were concerned with assessing the impact of the change in legislation in terms of the effects on the school's administrators, disruption to teachers and the implications for racial problems if parents could move their child at will.

Although the L.E.A schools are not private and fee charging, the granting of parental freedom to choose is of some interest. In particular, a study by MacAulay, Strachan and MacBeth (1986) of the effects of the new legislation in Scotland used a survey as the basis of understanding parent choice. Their findings established that parents tended to rely on secondhand information about the school because their visit to the school was formal. Parents' reasons for choosing a particular school were frequently vague statements like "It's a good school" or "It's got a good reputation" (p.17). The findings revealed that the most popular schools were those located in areas of comparative affluence. Parents were found to be particularly conscious of "standards relating to pupil intake, discipline, academic attainment and the quality of staff (p.17). The study also found that parents choosing a secondary school tended to look for the "traditional" education which would lead to qualifications and jobs.

Another study undertaken in Britain to investigate reasons for parent choice under the new Education Act (1980) was that of Stillman (1986). He concluded that parents seemed to be very influenced by local issues and that there was a tendency for educational standards and academic records to emerge as the most important reasons for choice of a particular school. In addition he noted that in 78% of cases the child's opinion was considered important (p.11).

Factors involved in parental selection of non-denominational schools in Edinburgh and Dundee were examined by Adler and Roab (1988). They found that parents were inclined "towards more effective schools" (p. 176). However, parental choice was influenced by distance, with few parents choosing schools which required much additional travel.

These studies originated outside of Australia and included secular schools, Catholic and non-Catholic schools. They are also affected by cultural and environmental factors which are not spelt out. Certain factors, however, emerged with sufficient regularity to be considered common ground in a study of parental choice. These included the desire of parents to have more control over their children's education, a religious education, establishment of moral values, firm discipline, academic results, quality of staff and class size.

2.3 AUSTRALIAN STUDIES

A review of studies which focussed on Australia highlighted certain issues which are particularly pertinent to the local situation. These are considered separately below.

2.3.1 DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

Within Australia research has noted a distinct drift away from the government system towards the private system in recent years. Campbell (1988, p.4) pointed out that in 1975 21.3% of students attended private schools while in 1987 the figure had risen to 26.9%. Maslen (1982, p.11), in School Ties - Private Schooling in Australia, stated that "By their responses to market forces, while at the same time maintaining the Old School traditions, private schools in Australia have begun to attract an increasing number of parents from the state school systems". This trend is also evident in Western Australia, where a recent report indicated that there is strong disillusionment with government schools and that parents are "turning their backs on the state education system in favour of private schools" (Brandreth and Thornton, 1989). These authors noted that the number of full-time students enrolled in W.A. private schools has risen by 4% between 1981 and 1987, while in the government sector there has been no growth in school enrolments over the same period. At the secondary level, private schools showed a 6% growth while state schools grew only 2%. Brandreth and Thornton (1989) quoted

Mr Hann, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools, as saying "People these days seem to be prepared to pay for things like staff stability and a different quality of education".

Brandreth (1989) expressed the view that parents are turning to private schools to provide "the best standard of education, discipline and pastoral care", factors which bear comparison to the American studies cited. He commented that parents "believed that teachers at private schools gave more attention to students" and that "the private schools had a greater stability of staff". He reported that disillusionment with the government system of education centred on the many changes undertaken by the Education Ministry in recent years, including the establishment of Unit Curriculum and the Better Schools programme.

Kenway (1987), in a study of three private schools in Perth, suggested that government schools provide a negative reference group for the private schools. She considered that the media and the private schools "feed" on negative stories about government schools and argued that the media is in the hands of right wing educationalists who are committed to private schools (Kenway, 1987, p.196). Her thesis argued that it is a myth that government schools are in crisis and that the negative publicity about government schools is a conspiracy by the extreme right. In a lecture delivered at Murdoch University on March 29th, 1989, Kenway criticized the media for its deliberate campaign against

the government schools and its representation of private schools as symbols of excellence and success.

Morrison (1983, p.46), in a study of why parents chose to send their children to Anglican schools in Sydney, also pointed to the negative view that private schools hold of the government system. He suggested that parents perceive that something is missing in the government system. He was critical of the Government for not addressing the problem, but considered that it was for fear of what might be uncovered. Maslen (1982), in a discussion of a survey regarding parent choice undertaken by The Age newspaper highlighted the lack of teacher strikes and expectation of better discipline in comparison with the government system as reasons of choice. Barcan (1981, p.92), in a discussion of the drift to private schools, also suggested that any radical change in the government system leads to a rejection of it in favour of the private system.

In contrast Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett (1982, p.51), in a detailed research project exploring the differences between the private and public school systems and their products, suggest that the oft-reported breakdown in discipline in government schools is not a media invention but a result of the growth of youth culture. Nevertheless, their study supported the notion that there are very real differences between the public and the private educational sectors.

2.3.2 INCREASED GOVERNMENT FUNDING

In considering factors which are particularly pertinent to the Australian scene, the role of the Federal Government in recent years cannot be overlooked. Several studies (Maslen, 1982; Kenway, 1987) have pointed to the increased financial commitment of the Federal Government to the private sector. This has been an important factor in opening up places in the private schools to a wider section of the community and so encouraging the growth of the private school sector. Maslen (1982) drew attention to the increasing number of grants to the private schools since the early 1970's for libraries, science blocks and other buildings (p.11). He commented that, "despite overall falling numbers of school pupils, the government continues to finance the building of new non-government schools and the extension of existing ones "(p.37).

Brandreth (1989) pointed to the new low-fee community schools, set up by the Anglican and Catholic churches in lower socio-economic areas, as being the biggest growth area in the private sector. He noted that the concern over this growth focused on the resulting drop in numbers in state schools and the continued channelling of government funds into these private schools. Magill (1986), in a discussion of parents choice of Christian schools, highlighted the hand-in-hand relationship between the growth of government funding and the rise in the number of new, small, independent schools. The Deputy Director of Catholic Education in Western Australia was reported in The

West Australian (May 10th, 1989) as denying that the Catholic schools were competing with the government schools for students but rather working "hand-in-hand to supply an education service."

Kenway (1987) gave particular attention in her study of private schools in Perth to the role of government funding. She argued that the government had virtually "sold out" to the private school sector and that, by giving it financial support, allowed it to flourish and undermine the government system. Mr John Dawkins, Federal Minister for Education, Employment and Training, in his 1988 address to the Seventh National Conference of Independent Schools, acknowledged the growing commitment of the Federal Government to financially assist the private sector and linked this commitment to the recent growth in the number of pupils attending private schools in Australia (Dawkins, 1988, p.9).

2.3.3 NATURE OF THE PARENT GROUP

In attempting to explain why parents choose a private system of education for their children, most studies give some attention to the background, qualifications and occupations of the parent group. In her study of three private schools in Perth, Kenway found that the occupations of the fathers were concentrated in the professional and managerial sectors and that they tended to have a higher education. In addition, they resided in more expensive and

reputable suburbs (Kenway, 1987, p.372). Kenway also suggested that these parents, by buying their childrens' education, gain membership of the dominant order; it is an investment in their child's future.

Kenway considered that parents felt that buying a private school education was the first step towards gaining access to one of the high-status professions. Entrance to a tertiary institution was felt to be virtually guaranteed by a private education. She noted that there was an implicit assumption among this group that education does not finish until after tertiary studies (p.323). Maslen (1982) points to A.C.E.R research which shows that where a person goes to school in Australia makes a difference to the student's achievement, chance of getting a job, and how long the student will stay at school (page 41)." In addition he noted that "Protestant schools educate 8% of students yet their students are most likely to get a higher education and are headed for the best-paid, prestigious jobs (p.41)." An article in The West Australian on May 13, 1989 supports the belief that for private school students the expectation of continuing to a tertiary education is much higher than in the state system. The University of Western Australia's acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ray Lourens, was quoted as saying that "Thirty percent of former government pupils were studying university courses while 47% of those from private schools were at university." Professor Lourens also commented that "Educational aspirations are affected by the state of the family and the community; that when

surroundings were low a student aimed low and when high they aimed high."

Connell et al. (1982) drew similar conclusions about the nature of the parent group who chose the private system, particularly the "elite" schools. The parents were generally affluent and considered that their children had an academic future. In contrast, parents of children in the government system were mostly of the working class and often had negative experiences in school themselves. As a consequence they felt alienated and negative towards their child's secondary school (Connell et al., 1982, p.55).

Both Kenway and Connell et al. stressed that the growth of the New Right has led to a strong shift to the private system by the most articulate and educationally qualified of the parent group.

2.3.4 COMMON FACTORS OF CHOICE

There have been several studies which attempted to discover the key factors for parental choice of the private system. Although these revealed a range of factors, which varied in their ranked positions, certain factors were common to most of the five studies examined. The studies listed between five and eight key factors (Table 2.1), with six holding some common ground. These included:

- 1) Discipline.
- 2) Christian foundation - moral values.
- 3) Academic standard.

- 4) Caring attitude - individual attention.
- 5) Family tradition.
- 6) Quality of staff.

2.3.4.1 DISCIPLINE: Morrison (1983) examined the process of choice made by Sydney parents in deciding to send their children to an Anglican School. Morrison was concerned with understanding why parents left the state system in favour of the private. The schools in his study included both single-sex and co-educational institutions. Through a survey of parents, Morrison concluded that there were five key reasons (see Table 2.1) for parent choice of a private school and rejection of the government system.

After analysing his percentage frequency data by factors, Morrison found that the most important reason for the decision was an expectation of improved discipline. Three of the other four studies also list discipline as an important factor. Interestingly, only one study, that of Tannock, Punch and Figgis (1972), which is a study of a Perth girls' school, does not include discipline as a factor. Also, Kenway (1987), who included a girls' school in her study, listed discipline as a factor but ranked it number eight in a list of nine factors.

Table 2.1Ranked factors relating to parental selection of private schoolsKenway (1987)

Not directly ranked. List drawn from emphasis implied by Kenway.

1. Buying a future
2. Tradition/ Family ties
3. Academic future
4. Young lady
5. Religion
6. Staff
7. Better discipline
8. Uniform

Dickinson (1981)

Implied ranking

1. Religious affiliation
2. Family tradition
3. Academic standard
4. Ethos / discipline
5. Quality of staff
6. Education programme
7. Geographical location
8. Emphasis on special areas

Tannock et al. (1972)

Direct ranking analysis

1. Small class size
2. Self-realization
3. Close staff/student contact
4. Emphasis on well-rounded personality
5. Better start

Morrison (1983)

Ranked by factor

1. Discipline
2. Caring environment
3. Individual attention
4. Moral values
5. Dedicated teaching staff

Burrell (1981)

Ranked by percent frequency in responses

1. Development of a Christian attitude
2. Development of mind and character
3. Firm discipline
4. Individual attention
5. Staff stability

2.3.4.2 CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES - MORAL VALUES: In his study of non-government secondary schools in Ballarat, Burrell (1981), through a survey of the parent group, suggested that there were five main features which parents saw as being offered by the private system. Burrell's data analysis was a simple ranking and this showed parental concern for the development of a Christian attitude and moral values as the most important factor.

Burrell's study encompassed both co-educational, single-sex, Catholic and non-Catholic institutions with a wide range of fees. Like Morrison (1983), he was largely concerned with finding out why the parent group had rejected the government secondary system and his findings reflect an overview of a diverse range of institutions. Nevertheless, his analysis highlights some differences in parental expectations between the different schools he studied. Parents who chose the Catholic system considered religion, developing a Christian attitude and developing the mind of the student as high priorities, while the non-Catholic school parents rated dissatisfaction with the government system, staff stability and individual attention as most important (Burrell, 1981, p.57).

With one exception, that of Tannock et al. (1972), all other studies also place strong emphasis on the development of Christian values and morals. Dickinson (1986), long term principal of an independent boys' school in Perth, suggested in his address to the National Council of Independent Schools that, in his experience, there were

eight factors of particular significance (see Table 2.1) - of which religion and a Christian upbringing were the most important. Dickinson's comments were, however, based on his experience and understanding of parents over a long period but were not substantiated by any formal data collection.

In research undertaken in Western Australia, Tannock et al. (1972) looked at both Wesley College (boys) and St. Hilda's Anglican School for Girls in order to determine reasons for parental choice of a private school. Leinster-MacKay (1972), in a discussion of Tannock's study, suggested that historically, for boys' schools, there has been a shift in emphasis of parents' decisions across time. This has seen a change from decisions based on a desire for religion, emphasis on morals and gentlemanly conduct to the factors highlighted by Tannock et al., of academic strength and development of character.

2.3.4.3 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: All of the studies reviewed included a desire for academic excellence as a significant factor, although the emphasis placed on it varies or is associated with such considerations as class size, better start and quality of staff (see Table 2.1). Both Morrison (1983) and Burrell (1981) only refer to it indirectly in their ranking at number five with a desire for dedicated teaching staff or staff stability, respectively. All studies suggest that, for parents, there is an assumption

that the school will provide a good academic education which will allow their children to achieve at a high level.

2.3.4.4 CARING ENVIRONMENT - INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION: All of the studies rank, in some way, caring and individual attention as being of significance to parents in making their choice of school. Several of the studies rank these considerations in their top three (see Table 2.1).

Tannock et al. (1972), in their study of St. Hilda's School for Girls in Perth, explored parents' expectations of the school. The study revealed five main reasons for parent choice of the school. These were:

- 1) Small class size.
- 2) Self-realization and self-fulfilment.
- 3) Closer contact between staff and student.
- 4) Emphasis on a well-rounded personality.
- 5) Better start.

Of note, is that all of these factors in some way express concern for the creation of an environment where students will receive individual attention and which provides a caring approach, allowing the individual to flourish. This emphasis on personal needs and development of the individual contrasts with the factors identified by both Burrell (1981) and Morrison (1983) in their studies. In these studies, personal needs and the development of the individual were also noted as factors which influence

choice, but both authors considered discipline and staff stability as also being of importance.

2.3.4.5 FAMILY TRADITION: Of particular interest is the fact that it was only in schools studied in Western Australia that family tradition was considered to play an important part in the choice of a school. Dickinson (1986) ranks it very highly, as does Kenway (1987).

In her study of three "elite" schools in Perth, one of which was a single-sex, non-Catholic girls' school, Kenway (1987) did not specifically survey parents but rather undertook an ethnographic study of the three schools and relied heavily on observation and informal interviews to form the basis of her findings. She acknowledged that her study was based on a marxist-feminist interpretation of the school situation and that her main interest was in exploring these schools as bastions of the right wing and powerful members of the community. She suggested, however, that parents have very strong reasons for selecting these schools. She indicated she considered that parents are buying their child's place in a capitalist society and establishing them in a network which will be with them for life. In relation to the particular girls' school in her study she emphasized the importance of tradition and family ties as very important factors in parental choice.

Kenway (1987) also indicated that parents are looking for both an academic future for their daughters as well as training to be a young lady who will fit comfortably into the privileged society in which she mixes. The underlying conflict in these aims was noted by Kenway, as she considered that the parents were clearly anti-feminist and yet they were encouraging their daughters to undertake professional careers. The resolution of this conflict appeared to be that the daughters were guided towards the "acceptable" professions for girls.

2.3.4.6 QUALITY OF STAFF: All studies reviewed either list (see Table 2.1) or imply that quality of staff is a factor in parental choice. Although it is not listed as a highly ranked factor in any of the studies it seems to be a generally accepted feature of the private school. Where it is not listed explicitly it is associated with such factors as dedication of staff and staff stability.

2.3.5 SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION

Of special interest in the studies cited is the fact that there is little, if any, reference to the significance of the single-sex aspect of many private schools. Kenway (1987) certainly took note of the single-sex aspect of the girls' school in her study. However, she suggested that little attention was given to the possibility of using the

situation to provide for a greater range of opportunities for the students. While the girl's school offered the same academic curriculum as the boy's school in her study, no attempt was made to offer the girls such subjects as technical drawing, manual arts and suchlike, although they were offered the traditional domestic sciences (Kenway, 1987, p.337).

Recent gender-oriented studies (Brown, 1981; Parker, 1981; Sampson, 1981) have highlighted the research that indicates that girls are disadvantaged by co-education. Parker (1981) looked closely at the study undertaken by Martina Horner in which she showed that, in a co-educational situation, girls are motivated to avoid academic success. She also pointed to the desirability of single-sex education in that it provides positive role models for girls to aspire to. Dawkins (1988) acknowledged that the government needed to focus on the education of girls and offer wider options to overcome the traditional expectations. The Schools Commission Report Girls, School and Society (1975) explored the limitations which girls face and suggested tactics which could be implemented to overcome these restrictions. Certainly there is strong evidence to suggest that single-sex education is an approach which can redress the imbalance, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science.

2.3.6 GROWTH OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The 1980s have seen a growth in the private school sector, which studies suggest can be explained by disillusionment with the government system, as well as increased funding to non-government schools by the Federal Government. Magill (1986) suggested that the growth of many new, small, Christian, family-oriented schools in recent years is evidence of this trend. Smart (1986), in discussing this shift to private schools, pointed out that the real cost of a private school education has actually dropped in recent years, thus opening up these schools to a wider section of the community. Kenway (1987) also commented on the reduced real cost of a private education and suggested that a growing awareness of the value of education has led many parents to take up the private school system in order to ensure future success.

Because of these various social and economic changes, the private schools are currently enjoying a period of popularity and growth. However, many studies suggest that schools need to be alert to any changes in market trends and that they need to know what it is that influences parents to choose their particular school rather than others of a similar kind (Mechielson, 1988; Dixon, 1981; Slattery, 1986; Starr, 1986). The Australian Broadcasting Commission, in its 1989 "Education Now" radio broadcasts, has featured discussions on this issue by educationists and marketing experts. Professor Hedley Beare pointed to the reality that the 1990s will see an overall decline in

student numbers and therefore a more competitive market. Gary Oliver, of Holt Public Relations, stressed the need for schools to promote themselves in the community to ensure a share of the market. He felt that the creation of a suitable image which matched the reality of the school was vital if schools are to survive. He argued that it is essential for schools to know exactly what it is that parents are seeking in the education of their children. Schools, he felt, must seek information from parents and the community and be sensitive to the current demands of their consumers.

Morrison (1983) pointed to the fact that the current negative view of the government system feeds the private schools. However, if the government system were to be perceived differently through some changes or, as Kenway (1987) argued, through gaining "ownership" of the media, the private schools would certainly suffer. Equally, despite the failure of the government initiative to reduce funding to the private sector under Senator Ryan, several studies (Smart, 1986; Kenway, 1987; McCrae, 1989) have suggested that there is no guarantee that the present level of funding will continue and emphasis should be given to the need for private schools to become financially more self-reliant.

2.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REVIEW

The literature suggests that there is some common ground concerning the reasons for parents choosing the private system, although none of the studies gives particular attention to analysing whether parents looked closely at several private schools before reaching a decision. The factors which parents considered important in choosing a particular private school over another of similar type have yet to be established. The findings from the present study should meet the deficit and be of particular interest to the administrators of the schools concerned.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The literature review indicated that, whilst the exploration of overseas literature provided interesting background material, there were differences in context, culture and education systems which required a concentration on the Australian studies for the identification of specific factors of choice. Within the Australian studies there were a variety of factors identified, with six of these showing a high level of commonality. These factors (discipline, Christian values, academic standard, caring environment, family tradition and the quality of staff) were used as the basis for the development of the conceptual framework and the generation of research questions.

CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter describes the construction of an initial conceptual framework based upon the literature and a number of logical assumptions. This framework was used both in the formulation of specific research questions and as a guide for the study.

Because of the lack of any recent local studies the administrators of independent, non-Catholic, girls' schools in Perth have little valid data to inform them of the perceptions that parents have of their schools. The literature review indicated a number of factors which may well have significance for their situations, but there is little direct evidence that these factors can be related to any particular school in the Western Australian context. The research study was aimed, therefore, at determining the factors which are relevant to the Western Australian situation. It sought to determine why parents chose to send their daughters to specific independent schools and to identify the most significant factors leading to this decision.

3.2 AN INITIAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The development of a conceptual framework for the study was deemed appropriate to allow for the initial identification of all possible variables and the ways in which they might have influenced parents undergoing the selection process. The development of this framework was undertaken at three levels.

At the first level Figure 3.1, illustrates aspects of the process of choice undertaken by parents. The key terms used (based on Rosenberg (1968)) are defined as:

Choice: A selection from alternatives.

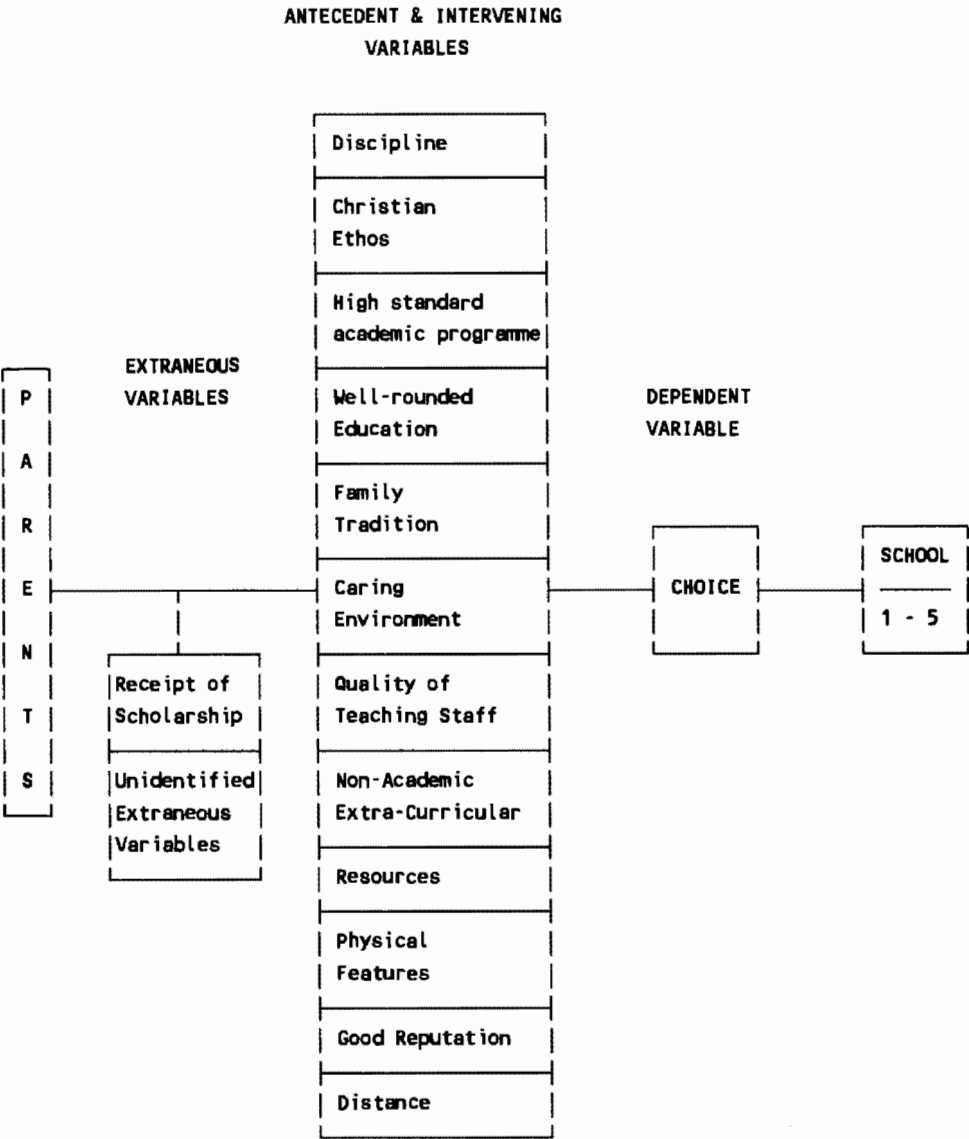
Intervening variable: A direct, strong, causal relationship/influence upon the dependent variable.

Antecedent variable: One which comes before the intervening variable.

Extraneous variable: One where the cause-effect relationship link with the dependent variable is weak.

Figure 3.1 illustrates, at the general level, the action of the intervening, antecedent and extraneous variables which were identified in the literature as factors which

Figure 3.1 Variables and their interaction with parent choice



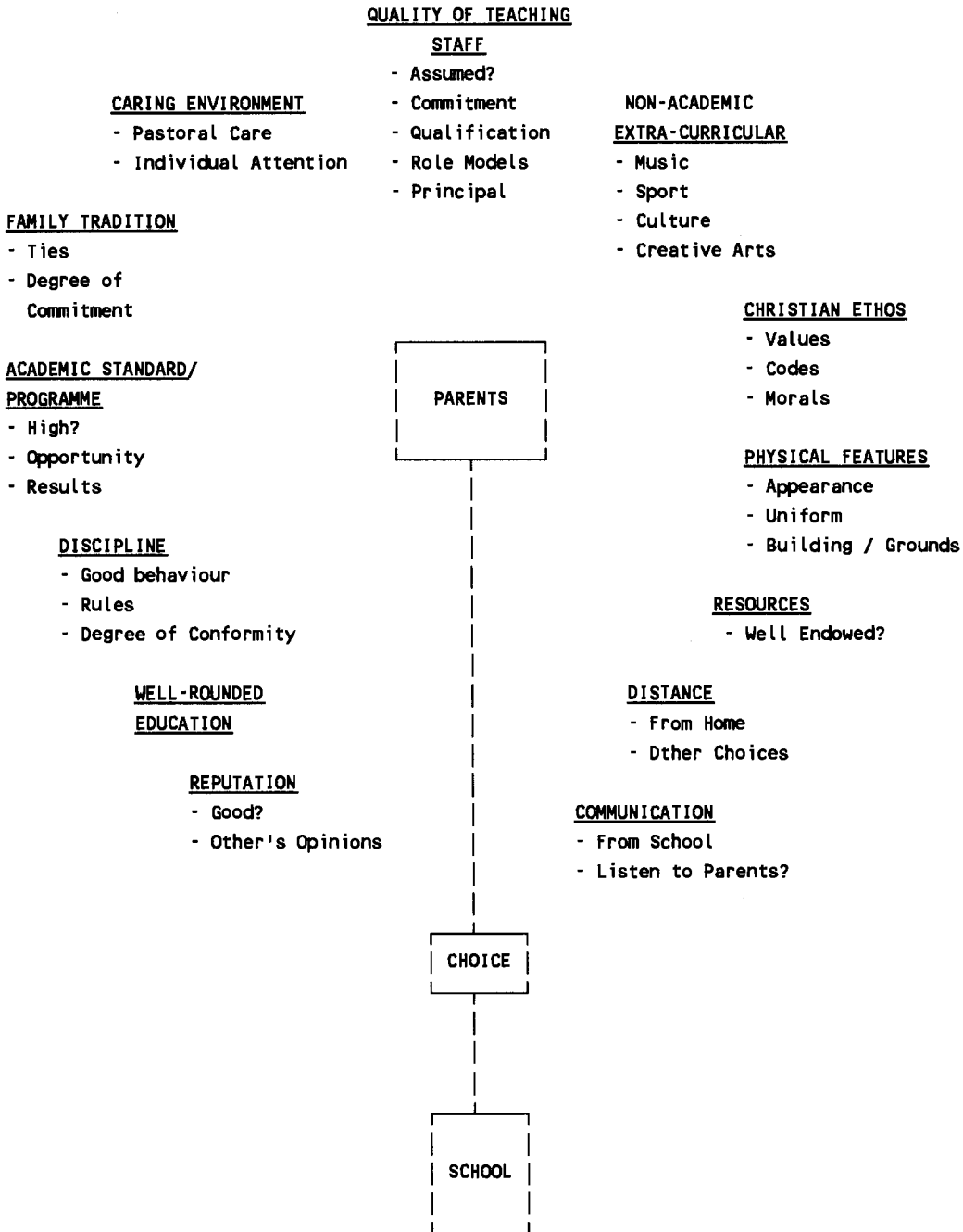
influenced parental choice of a school, as well as factors perceived by the researcher to possibly be of significance. These variables were the factors which formed the basis of the research questions.

At the second level, the sub-components of the identified variables were considered in a schematic environment surrounding the parent (Figure 3.2). Within this environment parents may draw on, or respond to, any of the variables or their sub-components before arriving at a choice of school.

The third level involved testing the validity and/or importance of the previously identified variables or supposed variables. Research questions were devised which would establish the role of the variables, either individually or in combination, in parental selection of a particular independent, non-Catholic girls' school in Western Australia.

It was acknowledged, however, at the initial stage of design of the conceptual framework that there may be other intervening, antecedent or extraneous variables not identified by the literature or perceived by the researcher. To accommodate the possibility that such variables may exist, it was decided that the survey should include a section where parents would be free to note any other variables which impinged on their decision making.

Figure 3.2 Intervening and antecedent variables and their relationship to parent choice.



3.3 INTERVENING AND ANTECEDENT VARIABLES

3.3.1 DISCIPLINE

The desire for firm discipline (defined as an ordered and codified environment) and a general expectation of good behaviour was identified as a significant factor of choice in several studies mentioned in the literature review (Morrison, 1983; Burrell, 1981). The degree of discipline required varied and is obviously difficult to measure but the expectation seems to have been for order, regulation and a structure which had established codes of behaviour and a clearly established system of disciplinary procedures.

A research question devised to examine the significance of discipline was:

- To what extent does the expectation of a disciplined environment influence parental choice of a school?

3.3.2 CHRISTIAN ETHOS

The literature identified, in a variety of forms, the significance of a Christian ethos - moral values or Christian foundation. The term ethos is defined as the characteristic spirit of a community and is used in this instance to encompass the desire for some degree of Christian foundation, identifiable in the school's

religious affiliation, religious rituals and general approach.

The research question generated to examine this aspect was:

- To what extent does evidence of a Christian spirit within a school's ethos influence parental choice ?

3.3.3 HIGH STANDARD OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

The concept of some form of academic excellence, standard or opportunity for development of mind in the academic programme offered appeared as a factor in the some of the studies cited in the literature review (Kenway, 1987; Dickinson, 1986). The research questions evolved were:

- To what extent do the educational qualifications of parents influence their expectations in the choice of a particular school?
- To what extent does expectation of academic excellence influence parental choice?

However, the studies cited in the Literature Review did not spell out the nature of the academic programme offered beyond a general level. Academic programme is defined as subjects within the curriculum which are presented as a regular part of the coursework. This research sought to identify, as well as establishing if it was a factor of

significance, whether individual academic subject areas were of greater importance than others as factors of choice. The general research question evolved was:

- To what extent did the academic programme influence parental choice of a particular school?

3.3.4 WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

None of the studies in the literature review specifically identified the concept of a well-rounded education as a factor of choice. However some of the studies did rank such factors as "development of mind and character" (Burrell, 1981) and "emphasis on well-rounded personality" (Tannock, 1972) which bear some relationship to a well-rounded education. The research question evolved was:

- To what extent does the desire for a well-rounded education influence parental choice ?

3.3.5 FAMILY TRADITION

The possible influence of family connection with a particular school being a factor of influence was not identified by studies in the literature review which originated outside Perth. However, Kenway (1987) and Dickinson (1986) both suggested that it was of significance. The researcher's observation of the Western

Australian situation led to a conviction that family ties with a particular school could be a significant variable. This was based upon observations that sisters are usually sent to the same school while it is often the same school attended by the mother or a close family relation.

In order to identify the nature and extent of this influence in the choice process, several research questions emerged. These were:

- To what extent does family tradition influence the choice of school?
- To what extent does parents' own secondary education background influence their choice of a particular school?
- At which point in their daughter's early years do parents choose a particular school?
- Which parent has the most influence in the choice of school - mother, father or both ?
- Does the daughter have any influence on the choice of school?

3.3.6 CARING ENVIRONMENT

The expectation of a caring environment, pastoral care, individual attention, small class size and general awareness of individual needs feature in some form in several studies cited in the literature. Pastoral care, a term currently used to encompass these features, is defined in the Beazley Report (1984) as: "the provision of an environment in which it is possible for each person associated with the school (student, parent, staff member) to fulfil their basic personal needs and expectations, as defined in experiences of self-worth, adequacy, security and warmth of relationships "(1984, p.149).

Research questions seeking to establish the significance of these features were constructed:

- To what extent does the provision of pastoral care influence parental choice?
- To what extent does the existence of good communication channels influence parental choice?

3.3.7 QUALITY OF TEACHING STAFF

Several studies have highlighted the significance of quality of staff as an important factor of choice (Morrison, 1983; Burrell, 1981). The term quality is defined as pertaining to a degree of excellence or

accomplishment. Quality of staff, in the context of the research, was generally accepted as encompassing an expectation of staff being well qualified, dedicated and stable (in the sense of remaining within the school for a reasonable length of time).

A research question to test the relevance of this factor to the study was:

- To what extent does evidence of quality of staff influence parental choice?

3.3.8 NON-ACADEMIC COURSES AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

An area not identified as significant in parents' selection of a school in the literature, but perceived by the researcher to be of possible significance in parental choice of a particular school, included the provision of courses in music, creative arts and sport.

The research questions designed to test the significance of these factors were:

- To what extent does the opportunity for involvement in such areas as music, creative arts and sport influence parental choice?

- To what extent does the reputation of the school for areas such as music, creative arts and sport influence parental choice?

3.3.9 PHYSICAL FEATURES

The literature did not highlight the physical appearance, size of the school, the appearance of the uniform or the availability of resources as being significant influences on parental choice of school. However, it can be argued that these factors might be of significance in the choice of a particular school.

Research questions designed to test the significance of these factors were constructed. They were:

- To what extent is the physical appearance of the school significant in the choice of a particular school?
- To what extent is the size of the school significant in the choice of a particular school?
- To what extent is the school perceived to be endowed with physical resources?
- To what extent is the appearance of the uniform significant in the choice of a particular school?

3.3.10 GOOD REPUTATION

The literature cited did not identify in any specific way the possible influence of reputation as a factor influencing choice. The term good reputation implies that the school is held in high esteem by the community. The researcher felt that the reputation of the school might be a significant factor of choice of a particular school. In addition, it was felt that part of the perception of a good reputation included gaining positive impressions from observing student behaviour in the community.

Research questions to test this factor were:

- To what extent does the school's reputation influence choice?
- To what extent did the opinion of others influence parental choice?
- To what extent did observing the students' behaviour in the community influence parents' choice?

3.3.11 DISTANCE

The literature did not highlight geographic distance of home from the school as significant in the process of choice. Dickinson (1986), in a list of unranked factors did mention location of school as a possible influence.

The researcher felt that distance was a variable which might be significant in the choice of a particular school; if only because of implications for student travel.

A research question highlighting distance was:

- To what extent does distance from home influence parental choice of a school?

3.4 EXTRANEOUS VARIABLES

The only extraneous variable identified prior to conducting the survey was the receipt of a scholarship. Other extraneous variables which influence parental choice may exist and provision was made in the survey for parents to indicate in their own way the factors which most influenced their selection of the particular school.

3.5 SUMMARY

The research questions were generated from the conceptual framework which identified intervening and antecedent variables which had either emerged in the literature or were perceived from the researcher's own arguments as significant in the choice of a school.

The research mode which was adopted to test the research questions is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 OVERVIEW

The mode of research adopted was essentially one of survey analysis, combined with interviews to clarify emergent points or issues. The decision to use the mixed mode approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data sources, was made because the combination was felt to be appropriate to the nature of the research, allowing the two approaches to validate the findings.

The nature of the research, which required access to the perspectives of a large number of parents, made the use of a survey the most obvious choice. Generally surveys are valid and reliable data-gathering strategies because of their ability to efficiently reach, and solicit opinion from, a large number of people in a reasonable time frame. Timing was particularly important in this study because it was deemed important to survey parents as early as possible in the school year to minimize any contaminating effect of their actual school experience which might influence their response to a survey about choice of the school. The use of a survey was also considered appropriate because parents could express their opinions while remaining anonymous and unidentified to schools' administrations. In addition, it was felt that members of the schools' administrative staff would be more inclined to accept this form of investigation because they had prior access to the survey and could

verify its contents and be involved in its distribution. In addition, by using the survey as the main source of data, schools were not being asked to involve large numbers of parents in the significantly time-consuming and possibly intrusive task of interviews.

4.2 DATA SOURCES AND LOCATION OF SAMPLES

The primary sources of data were parents. Quantitative data was obtained through the administration of a survey while qualitative data was gained through interviews.

Initially, all six independent, non-Catholic girls' schools in Perth were approached with the aim of both administering a survey to parents of a random sample of new year eight students as well as interviewing a small number of parents. Five of the schools agreed to be involved in the study. The survey was restricted to new year eights only in order to attain more valid data. It was considered that parents of students who had come through the primary school might have chosen the school for different reasons at the primary level and may not have given a great deal of thought to factors related to their daughter's secondary education. Precise details of size and selection are provided in Section 4.3.1.4.

Qualitative data to amplify survey responses were obtained from interviews with three parents from each of the four participating schools. It was considered that this number

was both manageable, given the time required to arrange, administer and analyse data from interviews, while at the same time providing sufficient additional data to be of value to the study.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

4.3.1 THE SURVEY

The survey was based on the research questions identified in the discussion of the conceptual framework. The face validity of the survey is illustrated by the close relationship between the research questions generated from the conceptual framework and the questions contained within the survey.

4.3.1.1 DEVELOPMENT AND TRIALLING OF THE SURVEY: To ensure validity and reliability of the survey copies were distributed to teachers, Head of Year 8 and administrators in the researcher's own school for critical consideration. Appropriate changes were made as a result of this review process to ensure clarity and to avoid bias and ambiguity.

As a final evaluation, the sample survey was trialled using a small group of parents at the researcher's own school. This process was undertaken in order to test the clarity and content of the survey. Parents were encouraged to comment critically on the survey and to highlight any

concerns about content or understanding. Several minor changes to the wording were made in response to comments and suggestions arising from the sample group.

4.3.1.2 CONSTRUCTION: The survey consisted of two parts. The first section entitled Background Information consisted of fifteen questions, designed to elicit specific information through "yes" or "no" responses, or by responding to a range of alternatives which sought to provide a profile of parents, as well as data on the processes of booking and influences on decision making. Information sought included:

- School background.
- Tertiary qualification.
- Number of children.
- Distance from the school.
- Timing of decision making and booking in.
- The extent of multiple booking.
- Influence of the cost of fees.
- The role of various family members in deciding on the particular school.

Part two of the survey consisted of twenty-five items, twenty-one of which were evaluated by the use of the Likert Scale mode of response, using a five-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) while two items provided for open-ended responses. Item number 23 sought to elaborate on the responses to Item 22, which

sought to identify whether the parent was influenced by another person in the process of choosing, and if so by whom. The final item was also open-ended, to ensure that parents had an opportunity to either note any other factors influencing their decision which had not been revealed or to comment on any other matters.

The five-point Likert Scale mode of response was chosen because of its proven record in providing meaningful data in survey responses. It provided a spread of response, allowing parents to categorize their perceptions. The subtle difference between the choice of Strongly Agree and Agree or Strongly Disagree and Disagree encourages parents to consider their response and provide a more accurate picture of the influence of variables. The decision to include "Undecided" and thus not force a decision was based upon the principle that the choice of "Undecided" as an option could, in itself, be significant.

The twenty-one items based on the Likert Scale mode of response sought to answer the research questions identified in the conceptual framework. Sixteen of these items presented a positive statement such as Item 1:

Close proximity to the school was a major consideration in choice of school.

The remaining five items were presented as negative statements, for example, Item 4:

The size of the school population was not a significant factor in my decision.

The use of occasional negative phrasing was an intentional measure designed to eliminate "tunnelling" of responses and force respondents to consider their responses.

The items in this section concentrated on establishing the significance of specific factors associated with the chosen school such as:

- Family connections.
- Reputation.
- Academic programme.
- Physical resources.
- Non-academic programme.

A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix 2.

4.3.1.3 GAINING ACCESS TO SCHOOLS AND PARENTS: The principals of the six independent girls' schools in Perth were approached initially by letter (see Appendix 1). The letter outlined the nature of the study and indicated that the researcher would contact them within a short time to arrange an appointment to discuss the proposed research and to seek approval for the school to be involved.

The initial approach proved successful in all six cases and the researcher visited the schools with a copy of the

proposed survey for consideration and comment. The principals were assured of the anonymous and confidential nature of the survey and were asked to allow it to be distributed to a sufficient number of parents of new year eights in order to obtain a valid statistical sample. Five of the six readily agreed to being involved in the survey and expressed interest in the possible outcome. One school declined involvement, suggesting that the issue of school enrolments and parental choice was "too sensitive".

4.3.1.4 PARENT SAMPLE: As part of pre-research planning, sample sizes were determined so that the returns from the survey would sample approximately 50% of the total new intake population. The calculation of sample sizes was based on an estimated response rate to the surveys of around 60%. This estimated response rate figure was derived from the response rates experienced by researchers in a number of other studies which examined parental attitudes to educational matters (Morrison, 1983; Burrell, 1981). Intakes of new students in Schools 1, 3, 4 and 5 were in the range of 70 - 80 pupils, while the new intake into School 2 was just over 40. Sample populations of 60 parents were calculated as being required to fulfil the requirements for approximately 50% of the population to be sampled as well as providing for an adequate absolute sample size. However, in the case of School 2, the sample size was limited to 40 parents by the smaller intake. Ideally, it was intended that the parents surveyed would not have other daughters already in the senior school but,

in the interests of an adequate absolute sample size, this condition was not able to be met. However, those with children who had come through the primary school were excluded.

4.3.1.5. ADMINISTRATION OF THE SURVEY: The researcher distributed the surveys to the participating schools. Each survey form was placed in a stamped envelope, ready for mailing. The privacy and anonymity of the respondents to the researcher was guaranteed and achieved by using the school administration to address and post the surveys to parents of Year 8 students fitting the sample criteria. The schools agreed to use a random sampling technique, in the selection of the sample group but, as the researcher for reasons of confidentiality had no control over this aspect, it can only be assumed that this procedure was carried out.

Although the researcher had no access to the names of the parent group involved in the sample, particular schools remained identifiable by the use of a coding system on the surveys. A small, inconspicuous mark was placed on each survey in order that the researcher could identify the school. This allowed the data for individual schools to be identified and made available to the schools concerned.

Also included in the package sent to parents was a stamped, return-addressed envelope. Each principal agreed to include a cover letter to parents encouraging them to

complete the survey in view of its potential value to the school. Three weeks after the survey had been posted, the school followed up with a reminder notice publicized either through the school's weekly bulletin or some other open channel of communication.

4.4.1 INTERVIEWS

In order to expand on the factors that were deemed by parents to have influenced their choice the principals of participating schools were invited to provide the names and phone numbers of three randomly selected sets of parents who might be willing to be interviewed. Each principal agreed to make the initial approach to these parents to ensure that they were willing to be involved. The researcher had no control over the selection process and had, in good faith, to assume that the principals chose the interviewees at random. Given that the parents were readily identifiable to the school, it was agreed that the transcript of the interviews would not be made directly available to the school. These parents may or may not have completed the survey.

To ensure the validity and reliability of questioning techniques used during the interview situations, the researcher undertook to record three sample interviews. These were reviewed and analyzed by the researcher's supervisor, to ensure that the interviews were consistent and followed appropriate guide-lines. The interviews were

conducted, in all but two of the 15 cases, in the homes of the parents. This, in itself, provided a fuller picture of each parent's situation. The interviews were loosely structured, allowing parents to elaborate on areas of particular interest and concern, although a set of guide questions was used to ensure reasonable compatibility between interviews. The interview schedule is included in Appendix 3.

The interviews were audio-taped in order to have a complete record of the conversation and to permit detailed analysis at a later date. A selection of four transcripts has been included in Appendix 4, as the sheer bulk of these protocols did not allow the inclusion of all 15 interviews. Interviewees and their schools have not been identified in the transcripts, but each interviewee was provided with a copy of the transcript to verify its contents prior to inclusion in the Appendix.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The range of data analysis techniques used were:

1. A percentage frequency tabulation by school of the responses to all items based on a respondent by item matrix.
2. A summary of the percentage frequency by school response tables to each of the Likert scale items after scaling the

responses from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree over the range five to one respectively. Because of the treatment of data required in the factor analysis (see point 6), the few No Responses were scaled the same as Undecided (3), so that the data sets in all the various forms of analyses were equivalent.

The mean agreement/disagreement score for each item was calculated according to the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} &[(\text{No. of Strongly Agree} \times 5) + (\text{No. of Agree} \times 4) + \\ &(\text{No. of Undecided and No Response} \times 3) + (\text{No. of} \\ &\text{Disagree} \times 2) + (\text{No. of Strongly Disagree})] / \text{Total} \\ &\text{No. of responses.} \end{aligned}$$

3. Categorisation of the responses to the "free response" items (Items 16 and 25) and tabulation of the percentage frequency by the priority indicated by the parent.

Categorisation of the responses was achieved by defining the responses in terms of factors examined in the inventory of statements, other factors revealed in the literature and novel factors not previously identified. The comments made in response to Item 25 were also categorized and tabulated as a percentage frequency.

To determine overall priorities for Items 16 and 25, the priorities indicated by parents were scaled. Priority one was allocated four points, priority two was allocated three points and priorities three and four allocated two and one

points, respectively. The accumulated score for each category of response was determined by the formula:

$$(\text{No. of 1}^{\text{st}} \text{ priority responses} \times 4) + (\text{No. of 2}^{\text{nd}} \text{ priority responses} \times 3) + (\text{No. of 3}^{\text{rd}} \text{ priority responses} \times 2) + (\text{No. of 4}^{\text{th}} \text{ priority responses})$$

The accumulated score was then converted to a score out of 100, using the total accumulated scores for that school employing the formula:

$$\text{score out of 100} = \frac{\text{accumulated score}}{\text{total accumulated score}} \times 100$$

4. Cross-tabulation of the responses to some items in the inventory with aspects of the educational background of the parents and position of the home were undertaken. Because of the presence of empty cells and cells containing very low numbers, the data were unsuitable for statistical treatment using a Chi square test. Consequently, the Likert scale responses were scaled as noted above (Strongly Agree = 5 through to Strongly Disagree = 1) and the mean agreement/disagreement score determined for the various categories.

5. Content analysis and categorisation of the responses arising from the interviews and examination of the associations between these responses and the responses obtained in the inventory.

6. A Factor analysis (using the FACTOR procedure in SAS/STAT with VARIMAX rotation) (SAS/STAT User's Guide, Release 6.03 Edition, 1988) of the total sample population by the items examined in the inventory of statements using the Likert scale mode of response. The attitudinal data arising from the Likert scale responses were converted to numerical values by scaling the responses over the range 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree). Because factor analysis is unable to treat any data containing empty cells, the few nil responses were scaled equivalently to Undecided (3) to avoid discarding the useful data associated with these nil responses.

The technique of factor analysis reduces the number of variables which describe the sample population by taking account of the correlations between the variables in the data matrix. The factors produced from the analysis are entities which are composed of contributions from each of the variables in the data set. However, each factor is usually composed of a smaller number of primary variables which serve to characterise the factor. The primary variables which characterise a factor are determined from the absolute value of their loading on the factor. The variables derived from the analysis are descriptive variables and are not considered in any way as explanatory variables.

The first stage of factor analysis is principal component analysis, in which the components of the data matrix are reduced such that the first principal component (or

principal axis) is the linear combination of variables which explains the largest amount of the variance. Second and subsequent principal components are determined to be those combinations of variables which explain the maximum amount of the variance remaining and which are uncorrelated with the previous principal component (i.e. have axes which are orthogonal to the axis of the previous principal component). The second step is a rotation of the axes of the various principal components to allow clearer separation of the variables comprising each principal component. Of the various methods of rotation available, varimax rotation was used, as this technique simplifies the columns of a factor matrix, providing a clearer identification of the variables comprising the factors.

7. A Canonical Variate analysis (using the CANDISC procedure in SAS/STAT) (SAS/STAT User's Guide, Release 6.03 Edition, 1988) of the Likert scale responses to the statements, with the data classified by school. The attitudinal data were converted to numerical values in the same manner as for the Factor analysis. Canonical variate analysis is similar to the principal components analysis of the factor analysis, in that it reduces the number of variables used to describe a population by producing composite variables which are composed of contributions from each of the variables in the data set. However, it differs from factor analysis in the way that the reduced variables (canonical variates) are calculated. Principal components analysis accounts for the variance, such that each principal component explains the maximum amount of the

variance within a sample population; while in canonical variate analysis the canonical variates account for the maximum amount of variance between classes within the sample population. Because of this property of maximizing the variance accounted for between-classes, canonical variate analysis is the technique best-suited to examine the similarities and differences between the various schools in their responses to the items with Likert scale responses. The contributory value of each variable to the various canonical variates is determined from the absolute value of the standardized canonical coefficient.

4.7 ETHICAL ISSUES

In research of this nature it is important that the anonymity of the schools and participating parents be respected and protected. Information gained needs to be confidential. In the discussion that follows the schools will be referred to by a number and the interviewees remain anonymous.

The participants in the survey were guaranteed anonymity from the researcher by the use of a third party to address and distribute the survey. Because of the voluntary nature of the survey the school administration was unable to relate responses to specific parents. In a cover letter to those invited to participate, the anonymity of the process was stressed. The surveys were delivered to schools for distribution in March, 1989.

The interviews were initially set up by the principals so that only parents willing to be interviewed were made known to the researcher. Each interviewee was approached by telephone and confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed. The researcher sought permission to tape the interview in order to be able to compile an accurate account of the interview. The interviewee was to be given a copy of the transcript in order to verify its accuracy before inclusion in the manuscript. Because the identity of the interviewees was known to the school it was agreed that the principals would not be given direct access to their transcripts.

4.8 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The most pressing problem encountered initially was the difficulty of physically being able to set up interviews with principals in order to administer the survey as early as possible in the school year. Principals, given the pressure of busy schedules, were very accommodating although ultimately one of the six schools declined to become involved in the study. Apart from this, however, no major problems were encountered with the administration of the survey, although the limited number of new Year 8^s available at School 2 placed a constraint on the sample size obtainable from that school.

Most responses to the background items and the statements in the inventory only required parents to mark a preset

field. However, Item 16 in the inventory was open-ended. Parents were asked to list their academic priorities and a number of respondents clearly did not understand the meaning of "academic" and listed distinctly non-academic factors such as social reasons or boarding house facilities. This problem had not been noted in the trialling of the survey and the difficulty with this item was heavily concentrated in schools other than the one where the trialling took place.

The conduct of the interviews was reasonably trouble free although in one instance the parent, a country resident, changed her travel plans and eventually taped her responses to a list of suggested questions and posted them to the researcher.

4.9 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Data to examine the research topic was collected through a survey and interviews of parents and analysed through the use of univariate and multivariate techniques. The results of the analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 OVERVIEW

In presenting the findings of the research it was deemed appropriate to allocate them to a separate chapter from the discussion of the results. This chapter, through the use of tables, brief highlighting of significant results from the survey and reference to data gained from the interviews, presents the research findings. A full discussion of the results will follow in Chapter 6. This will allow a clear distinction between the raw data and the researcher's interpretation of that data to be maintained.

A total of 280 surveys were distributed and 197 (70.4%) returned. The number of responses ranged from 27 (School 2) to 45 (Schools 3 and 5) while response rates ranged from 65.0% (School 4) to 75.0% (Schools 3 and 5) (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1
Number of surveys sent and the returns from each school.

School	1	2	3	4	5
No. Sent	60	40	60	60	60
No. Returned	41	27	45	39	45
% Returned	68.3%	67.5%	75.0%	65.0%	75.0%

Fifteen interviews were conducted with parents (three from each school). Of the 15, nine were conducted with only the mother while six included both parents. Specimen transcripts of four interviews are included in Appendix 4.

5.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(Note: Where a response field was provided in the survey form but no responses were received, data are recorded as 0.0%. Where responses received were not provided for (e.g. No response to an item with a Likert scale response field) or responses were open-ended (e.g: Items 16, 25 and 26 in the inventory), a lack of data relating to that field is indicated as " - ".)

5.2.1 RELATIONSHIP OF RESPONDENT TO THE STUDENT

Question 1. What is your relationship with the student?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Mother	85.4%	81.5%	82.2%	71.8%	84.4%
Father	14.6%	18.5%	17.8%	28.2%	15.6%
Guardian	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The surveys were mostly completed by mothers, with the percentage of mothers completing the survey ranging from 71.8% in School 4 to 85.4% in School 1. School 4 had the highest percentage of fathers responding (28.2%). In the interviews 60% of interviewees were mothers, while 40% of interviews involved both parents.

5.2.2 EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF PARENTS

Question 2. Did you attend a private school for secondary schooling?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	29.3%	59.3%	33.3%	35.9%	31.1%
No	70.7%	40.7%	66.7%	64.1%	68.9%

Question 3. Did your spouse attend a private school for secondary schooling?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	48.8%	55.6%	33.3%	25.6%	35.6%
No	51.2%	44.4%	66.7%	74.4%	64.4%

Schools 3, 4 and 5 were relatively similar, with about one-third of parents having attended a private school.

However, School 2 showed a considerably higher percentage of parents with a private school education in comparison to all the other schools.

Question 4. Do you have a tertiary qualification?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	48.8%	48.2%	44.4%	46.2%	64.4%
No	51.2%	51.8%	55.6%	53.8%	35.6%

School 5 shows a significantly higher number of respondents with a tertiary education. As School 5 was the school with the second highest percentage of mothers completing the survey, this indicates that a larger percentage of mothers of School 5 have a higher level of education than mothers from the other schools.

Question 5. Does your spouse have a tertiary qualification?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	39.0%	44.4%	51.1%	43.6%	48.9%
No	61.0%	55.6%	48.9%	56.4%	51.1%

The responses to Items 4 and 5 revealed that in all schools almost half of the total number of parents (mother and/or father) were qualified at a tertiary level. This suggests that the sample parent group has a much higher standard of educational qualification than would be found in the parent group at government high schools.

5.2.3 FAMILY COMPOSITION AND LOCATION

Question 6. How many children do you have?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
1	4.9%	0.0%	8.9%	12.8%	11.1%
2	41.4%	55.6%	46.7%	35.9%	37.8%
3	36.6%	33.3%	40.0%	35.9%	31.1%
4 or more	17.1%	11.1%	4.4%	15.4%	20.0%

Most families had either two or three children.

Question 7. What distance do you live from the school (day girls only)?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
(No. day girls:	16	16	38	28	34)
0-5km	43.8%	56.2%	21.1%	21.4%	32.4%
6-10km	31.2%	25.0%	23.7%	39.3%	29.4%
11-20km	25.0%	12.5%	18.4%	28.6%	23.5%
21 or more km	0.0%	6.3%	36.8%	10.7%	14.7%

There was considerable variation in the distance lived from the school by families of day students. School 2 had just over half of respondents living within five kilometres while Schools 3 and 4 both had about one-fifth in the same

category. Schools 1 and 2 had three-quarters of their families within 10 kilometres of the school. School 3 had the highest percentage of students living 21 or more kilometres from the school.

The data from the interviews reflected this variation in distance from the school. However, in the case of students from Schools 1, 3 and 4 the distance travelled from home to school was to the nearest of the non-Catholic Independent Girls Schools', while in the case of Schools 2 and 5 the interviewees made it clear that the actual distance was not relevant: that school would have been chosen in any case.

5.2.4 BOOKING PROCEDURE AND INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS

Question 8. Was your daughter booked into more than one school?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	53.6%	37.0%	57.8%	46.2%	35.6%
No	46.4%	63.0%	42.2%	53.8%	64.4%

The number of parents booking their daughter into more than one school varied from about one-third in School 5 to over half in Schools 1 and 3.

The interviews revealed that parents of students at Schools 2 and 5 were much more definite about their choice, while in Schools 1, 3 and 4 some parents had booked in their daughters elsewhere, but ultimately made the decision on

the basis of distance, that particular school being the closest to their home. In several instances the mothers were old girls of schools some distance away and made it clear that, but for distance, they would have chosen their old school. One mother stated:

"We wouldn't have contemplated travel. If we lived near (School 5) she would certainly have gone there because I'm an old girl."

(Interview no. 14)

Question 9. If "Yes", how many?

	School: 1 (N = 22)	2 10	3 26	4 18	5 16)
2:	72.7%	60.0%	69.3%	72.2%	75.0%
3:	13.6%	40.0%	23.1%	27.8%	25.0%
4:	9.1%	-	3.8%	-	-
5:	4.6%	-	-	-	-
8:	-	-	3.8%	-	-

The majority of those who had booked their daughter into more than one school had chosen between two schools.

Question 10. At what stage did you decide that your daughter would attend an independent school?

	School: 1	2	3	4	5
Before primary school	36.6%	59.3%	28.9%	38.4%	37.8%
During Years 1 - 5	36.6%	33.3%	33.3%	46.2%	31.1%
During Year 6	9.7%	7.4%	20.0%	10.3%	13.3%
During Year 7	12.2%	0.0%	15.6%	5.1%	15.6%
After Year 7	4.9%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	2.2%

Sample parents from School 2 showed a significant difference in the timing of the decision to choose the private system, with over half having made the decision before primary school. This suggests a much stronger commitment to the private system from the parent group at School 2 than that of parents in the other schools.

Question 11. At what stage did you decide that your daughter would attend this particular independent school?

	School: 1	2	3	4	5
Before primary school	21.9%	33.3%	6.7%	7.7%	13.3%
During Years 1 - 5	24.4%	33.3%	13.3%	41.0%	24.5%
During Year 6	24.4%	22.2%	37.8%	28.2%	20.0%
During Year 7	17.1%	11.1%	40.0%	15.4%	37.8%
After Year 7	12.2%	0.0%	2.2%	7.7%	4.4%

Again, parents from School 2 stand out in their early commitment to that particular school, in contrast to parents from other schools. Parents from Schools 3 and 5 were slower in making a final decision when compared with parents from other schools.

Interviewees reflected these findings, with parents of School 2 indicating a stronger long-term support for that particular school through family or church affiliation. Some parents of students at Schools 1, 3, 4 and 5 indicated that they had seriously considered the government school alternative. For some, the various local high schools all had excellent reputations for academic achievement, so that the final decision to opt for the particular private school

closest to their home was usually based on non-academic aspects. For others, the local high school was considered inadequate. One parent commented in Item 26:

"We were not happy with what was being offered at our local country high school, in particular lack of facilities, poor discipline and the unit curriculum, so we moved to Perth."

(School No. 4, no. 17)

Another commented:

"We put her name down at birth but she had a choice about the local high school. Our first preference was an I.T. programme at (government high school)-but she didn't get in. Our second preference was a private school."

(Interview no. 15)

Question 12. Did you visit and inspect other schools before making your choice?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	34.2%	29.6%	33.3%	33.3%	35.6%
No	65.8%	70.4%	66.7%	66.7%	64.4%

Only about one-third of parents inspected other schools before making their decision. This suggests that most parents were reasonably sure of their decision and did not feel it was necessary to make comparisons.

Question 13. Did you visit and inspect this school before making your final choice?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	78.1%	55.6%	77.8%	82.1%	75.6%
No	21.9%	44.4%	22.2%	17.9%	24.4%

At least three-quarters of parents from Schools 1,3,4 and 5 inspected the school before finally deciding. The fact that a large number of parents inspected the school before making a final decision suggests that parents were keen to investigate for themselves aspects of the school and were not prepared to rely on the opinions of others. In School 2, in contrast, only just over half of parents inspected the school before choosing it. This suggests that parents either knew of the school (possibly as ex-students) or were satisfied with the perceptions they had of the school from the community.

The interviews produced a somewhat different result. Two of the three parents from School 2 did inspect other schools, although they indicated that they had a preconceived bias towards School 2 and it was unlikely that they would have chosen otherwise. With one exception, none of the parents interviewed from Schools 1, 3 and 4 had inspected elsewhere, despite the fact that two of the mothers from both School 1 and 4 were old girls of School 5, distance being considered too great a factor. Parents from School 5 provided the most variety, with one family, making a cursory inspection, acknowledging that it was a distant family association which decided them. Another did

not even inspect the particular school before making a last-minute decision to choose it; while the third family actually made a careful inspection before shifting their daughter from School 2 because they felt disillusioned with what it was offering.

5.2.5 IMPACT OF FEES

Question 14. In choosing an independent school, which by its nature is fee-charging, did you choose to give priority to education rather than using your financial resources for other purposes?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	95.1%	100.0%	91.1%	92.3%	93.4%
No	4.9%	0.0%	8.9%	7.7%	4.4%
No response	-	-	-	-	2.2%

Almost all respondents to the survey acknowledged that the fee-paying aspect was a consideration in their decision to send their daughter to a private school. A parent from school 5 wrote in response to Item 26:

My daughter's education comes before any material assets."

(Interview no. 12)

However, there was more diversity in the responses to this aspect in the interviews. School 5 showed the most extreme range, with one family indicating that it was a very real

problem for them and indicated that they had come to special arrangement with the administration to pay the fees in instalments. The father stated:

"Paying fees is a big consideration - we had to bite the bullet. It is difficult; we've had to make a lot of sacrifices."

(Interview no. 1)

Another family indicated that they lived very comfortably, with the fees not being a consideration at all. Responses from other interviewees varied from fee-paying being a significant drain on the income to others where the outgoings, although considerable, had been budgeted for; and finally to those where family income was such that fees were not a problem. Of note was the fact that in 14 of the 15 households interviewed all parents expressed a commitment to the private school education of their daughter and did not see the payment of fees as a sacrifice, but rather a genuine commitment to their daughters' future. A typical comment reflecting this attitude was:

"I think it is so important that I don't regard it as a sacrifice."

(Interview no. 5)

In one case only, interview number 15, the father expressed the opinion that although the fee-paying aspect was not a particular financial hardship he felt that they were not

getting an adequate return on their money. He had a very definite idea about what his money should buy and was dissatisfied. He stated:

"We're not getting sufficient return on our investment. By paying our money we should have a direct influence on how our money is applied - this is not happening."

5.2.6 THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION MAKER

Question 15. In choosing this school, who had the most influence in arriving at the final decision?

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Mother	12.2%	26.0%	11.1%	15.4%	28.9%
Father	2.4%	3.7%	6.7%	7.7%	2.2%
Daughter	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	4.4%
Mother and Father equally	48.8%	40.7%	22.2%	38.4%	33.3%
Mother, Father and Daughter equally	36.6%	22.2%	48.9%	35.9%	28.9%
Other	0.0%	7.4%	0.0%	2.6%	2.2%

The responses to the question as to who had the most influence in deciding on the particular school showed that over a quarter of mothers at School 5 were making the decision contrasted with as few as 11.1% of mothers at School 3. School 1 had almost one-half of parents making a mutual decision compared to only 22.2% at School 3. At School 3, about half of mothers, fathers and daughters

shared the decision as against less than a quarter at School 2.

The interviews indicated that, in three cases, 2 daughters at Schools 3 and one at School 4 had had a strong say in the choice of their secondary school, with parents indicating that their daughter had insisted on the school over the local government school. A mother at School 3 stated:

"It was (daughter's) insistence that made the difference. She's a very assertive girl; she knows her own mind!"

(Interview no.7)

5.3 RESPONSES RELATING TO THE INVENTORY OF STATEMENTS OF
POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON CHOICE

(Note: Where the term "significant" is used in some of the statements, its use is colloquial. The term is used in an equivalent sense to "important" to provide variety in the terminology and is without statistical implications.)

5.3.1 CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE SCHOOL BEING A MAJOR
CONSIDERATION IN CHOICE OF SCHOOL:

Item 1. Close proximity to the school was a major consideration in choice of school.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	7.3%	26.8%	2.4%	39.0%	19.6%	4.9%
School 2	0.0%	25.9%	0.0%	51.9%	14.8%	7.4%
School 3	11.1%	35.6%	2.2%	31.1%	20.0%	-
School 4	20.5%	41.0%	2.6%	25.6%	10.3%	-
School 5	4.4%	35.6%	8.9%	31.1%	17.8%	2.2%

The responses to Item 1 varied considerably, with School 2 having only one quarter Agreeing while School 4 had over half Strongly Agreeing and Agreeing. School 1, the school which in the background questions was found to be the only school with no day students travelling more than 20 kilometres to school, indicated that over half of parents Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed that close proximity was important. Schools 3 and 5 revealed a mixed response, with a spread between the two extremes.

In order to clarify the responses relating to day girls only, the responses of parents of day girls were extracted from the raw data and are presented below.

Item 1. Responses of day girls to the statement - Close proximity to the school was a major consideration in choice of school.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	18.8%	50.0%	0.0%	31.2%	0.0%
School 2	0.0%	43.8%	0.0%	43.8%	12.4%
School 3	13.2%	39.5%	2.6%	28.9%	15.8%
School 4	25.0%	42.8%	3.6%	21.4%	7.2%
School 5	5.9%	44.1%	8.8%	29.4%	11.8%

Schools 1 and 4 show over two-thirds of parents either Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing that proximity to the school was important. The interviews reflected these findings. All three parents from Schools 1, 3 and 4 indicated that distance was a major consideration in their choice of that particular school. Parents from School 4 would not have considered another private school because of distance. One mother said :

"I felt strongly that they should identify with the local community - I didn't want them to have to travel an hour or more each day."

(Interview no. 4)

In refusing to consider travel their choice became concentrated between the government school and the one

local private school, so that distance was not a final deciding factor. One mother at School 3 commented:

"I didn't want her to travel too far. I knew some people saw this school as below others such as (School 2) and (School 5), but that didn't bother me. She wasn't going to travel."

(Interview no. 8)

Parents interviewed from School 5 were very different. In two of the three families the daughters were travelling well over 20 kilometres to school, in the process passing other girls' schools. The parents acknowledged that the distance created some difficulties, particularly for after-school sporting commitments and socializing with friends out of school but were happy to tolerate them so their daughter could go to that particular school. One father said:

"It's a long way, but other girls live out here. She doesn't feel she's a martyr".

(Interview no. 3)

Clearly, parents have very different views about the importance of proximity but the evidence suggests that the closeness of the home to a private school can influence parents in their choice of school.

5.3.2 FAMILY CONNECTION BEING AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION:

Item 2. A family member attended the school, which was an important consideration.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	4.9%	24.4%	4.9%	31.7%	34.1%	-
School 2	33.3%	26.0%	14.8%	22.2%	3.7%	-
School 3	6.7%	11.1%	6.7%	46.7%	24.4%	4.4%
School 4	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%	33.3%	43.6%	-
School 5	20.0%	22.2%	4.4%	37.8%	15.6%	-

The responses to Item 2 varied widely from over half from School 2 either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing to School 4 having only 15.4% either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing, that family connection with the school was an important consideration.

The interviews supported these findings. Two of the parents from School 2 had strong family associations with the school and would not have seriously considered any other school for their daughter. Two of the mothers from both School 1 and School 4 had either attended, or been associated with, another girls' school some distance away and but for distance would have sent their daughter to their old school. Mothers interviewed from School 3 were all educated in government schools but had chosen the private school. Parents from School 5 varied, with one having chosen the school because of family connections while another, a government-school-educated mother, chose the school for academic reasons.

The evidence suggests that for parents at School 2 family tradition had a strong influence in their choice of that particular school, but that in other schools it was of less influence.

5.3.3 THE SCHOOL BEING RECOGNIZED AS HAVING A GOOD REPUTATION:

Item 3. The school is recognized as having a good reputation and being of high quality.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	58.6%	36.6%	2.4%	2.4%	0.0%
School 2	48.1%	51.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
School 3	33.3%	64.5%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%
School 4	43.6%	53.8%	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%
School 5	51.1%	48.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

There was strong agreement by respondents that their particular school was recognized as having a good reputation.

The interview data supported this finding, although there was some dissent about whether the good reputation held true in all cases. Two of three fathers interviewed from School 1 were critical of aspects of the school and were not convinced that the school's reputation was deserved. Two of three mothers from School 3 noted that the school's reputation could not be compared with those of other girls' schools, but said they felt it was rapidly improving under the direction of the new principal. In contrast, parents

from Schools 2, 4 and 5 were firmly convinced that their school's reputation was both good and well deserved. Parents interviewed acknowledged that the good reputation of the school was an important reason for their choosing the school.

5.3.4 THE SIZE OF THE SCHOOL POPULATION NOT BEING A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR:

Item 4. The size of the school population was not a significant factor in my decision.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	12.2%	58.5%	7.3%	12.2%	9.8%
School 2	7.4%	40.8%	7.4%	44.4%	0.0%
School 3	4.4%	35.6%	2.2%	42.2%	15.6%
School 4	10.3%	33.3%	10.3%	38.4%	7.7%
School 5	13.3%	42.3%	13.3%	24.4%	6.7%

Responses to Item 4 concerning the size of the school revealed mixed feelings from the parent groups, with only School 1 having a significant percentage (70.5%) either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing that the size of the school was not important. The responses of Schools 2, 3, 4 and 5 were distributed across a range, with between 40%- 55.6% Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with the statement.

Despite the overall mixed feelings regarding the significance of the size of the school some parents did highlight their feelings as responses to Item 26. One stated:

"Basically, in choosing a private school we were greatly influenced by the fact that our daughter is a solid worker but quiet and no doubt would have been lost in the state system."

(School 3, no. 23)

Another commented:

"I value my daughter's education highly. Her experience of the state primary system indicated that she would have been lost in a large state school because as yet her talents have not emerged fully."

(School 3, no. 19)

Interviewees reflected a similar range of responses to the survey item. Parents in School 1, having decided on the private school, possibly partly because of size (but dismissing other private schools because of distance) did not give special attention to it. Parents of students in Schools 3 and 4 did, in fact, acknowledge that the alternative government high school was rather large and overwhelming (interviews number 4 and 9), which did influence their choice. One mother commented:

"What bothered me about (government high school) was the opening of boundaries. The school was running at maximum capacity. My daughter was so young. I didn't want such overwhelming size."

(Interview no. 4)

Parents interviewed from Schools 2 and 5 did not see size as particularly crucial, although one mother from School 5, in rejecting the government system of education, was looking for a small, protective environment (Interview no. 2).

It is evident that parents were mixed in their feelings about the importance of the size of the school as an influence of choice. However, it is evident that for some parents choosing between the larger government high school and the smaller private school, size was of some importance.

5.3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF OBSERVING STUDENTS' BEHAVIOUR IN THE COMMUNITY:

Item 5. Observing the school's student behaviour in the community was important.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	14.6%	46.3%	19.6%	12.2%	4.9%	2.4%
School 2	25.9%	44.4%	25.9%	3.7%	0.0%	-
School 3	11.1%	60.0%	13.3%	15.6%	0.0%	-
School 4	12.8%	56.4%	12.8%	15.4%	2.6%	-
School 5	8.9%	48.9%	26.7%	13.3%	2.2%	-

The responses to Item 5 indicated general agreement that observing the behaviour of students in the community was of some importance, with between 57.8% of School 5 parents to 71.1% of parents in School 2 either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing.

Interviewees responses reflected the overall finding of the statements in the inventory, although there was some variation in general feeling about its importance. One mother commented:

"I must admit I did sort of watch students in the shopping centres etc. and I found they were always well behaved."

(Interview no. 2)

In contrast, two of the mothers from School 4 made a particular point of saying that they did not place a lot of value on appearances and could have accepted their daughters being part of the local high school. Generally, it was acknowledged that this aspect might have been of some importance but did not have great significance.

It may be argued that the observing of student behaviour was not a strong influence on parental choice of a private school but that it was possibly of minor significance.

5.3.6 THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF THE SCHOOL BEING

UNIMPORTANT:

Item 6. The physical appearance of the school was not important.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	4.9%	29.2%	4.9%	48.8%	12.2%
School 2	0.0%	44.4%	3.7%	44.4%	7.5%
School 3	8.9%	31.1%	4.4%	51.2%	4.4%
School 4	0.0%	15.4%	12.8%	56.4%	15.4%
School 5	13.3%	40.0%	8.9%	35.6%	2.2%

The response to statement 6 varied considerably, from just over one-third of parents in School 5 to almost three-quarters of parents in School 4 either Disagreeing or Strongly Disagreeing that the physical appearance of the school was not important.

This range in responses was also noted in the interviews.

In School 4 parents commented on the particularly pleasant, modern environment in which the school was located.

Parents from School 5 acknowledged the beautiful location but mixed architecture of the buildings, but felt it was not of particular importance. One father from School 1 was very critical of the school's architecture, because of its traditional design, and was particularly critical of the lack of planning for growth on the site (Interview no. 14). Parents from School 3 noted the small size of the site on which their school was located but felt the appearance and organization of the campus was very acceptable. One mother said:

"Well, it's a nice looking school; it's not beautifully laid-out but it's got character - that's a plus."

(Interview no. 8)

It is evident that for some parents, particularly those of School 4, the physical appearance of the school was of some importance as an influence on choice. In contrast, for parents of School 5, it was of much less significance, which suggests that School 5 parents were focusing their attention on other issues which they considered more important.

5.3.7 PERCEPTIONS AS TO WHETHER THE SCHOOL WAS WELL ENDOWED WITH PHYSICAL RESOURCES SUCH AS LIBRARY, COMPUTERS ETC.:

Item 7. The school appeared well endowed with physical resources such as library, computers etc.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	26.8%	56.1%	12.2%	4.9%	0.0%
School 2	14.8%	81.5%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%
School 3	13.3%	77.8%	6.7%	2.2%	0.0%
School 4	28.2%	66.6%	2.6%	2.6%	0.0%
School 5	24.4%	60.1%	8.9%	4.4%	2.2%

Most respondents either Strongly Agreed or Agreed that the particular school was well endowed with physical resources. One parent, from School 2, commented extensively in Item 26 and wrote:

"I teach at the local government high school.

It has oversized classes; there are not enough work spaces or stools - some children have to stand for each lesson. Facilities are poor, most of the computers, for example, are decrepit. If I can afford to send my daughter to a private school then I don't think I have the right to subject my child to such poor conditions."

(Item 26, no. 25)

The responses from interviewees generally supported the inventory responses, although there were some variations. One father, a teacher in the government system, felt that the local high school offered better resources than the private school. He said:

"Apart from the swimming pool and gym the resources are no different. The high schools in the area we live in have better resources - the private schools have a lot of showy resources."

(Interview no. 15)

In 9 of the 15 interviews, the question of physical facilities was felt to be either not particularly important in the decision making process, or the provision of physical facilities was assumed.

In these cases the parent had clearly taken little interest in this aspect. One mother from School 3 said:

"Resources were not an issue. It's nice to be taken through a room of computers, but I wasn't looking for it. I've always been a person who's accessed resources when I need them."

(Interview no. 7)

Of the other six interviewees, five felt that facilities were important and they had sought evidence of their being provided.

It might be argued that there was a general expectation that the private school would be well endowed with physical resources and that, as an influence on choice between a private school and a particular government high school, it was of some significance. However, for parents deciding between private schools it, was of little significance.

5.3.8 THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION CHANNELS BETWEEN THE PARENT AND THE SCHOOL:

Item 8. Evidence of good communication channels between parents and the school was important.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	41.5%	41.5%	14.6%	0.0%	2.4%
School 2	40.7%	55.6%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%
School 3	37.8%	51.1%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
School 4	33.3%	59.0%	5.1%	2.6%	0.0%
School 5	33.3%	55.6%	8.9%	2.2%	0.0%

Over four-fifths of parents associated with all schools agreed that good communication channels were an important consideration.

The results of the interviews reinforced this finding, although in most cases parents acknowledged that it was only after their daughter started at the school that they had become increasingly aware of the well established communication networks within the individual schools. Many gave instances of concerns which had been efficiently dealt with in a caring way. Several expressed the belief that the private school actively sought better communication between parents and school through the establishment of efficient methods of communication. This belief was linked strongly with the frequently expressed view that the private school chosen provided a more caring environment where students were treated as individuals.

It is considered that good communication channels were an important influence on parental choice because of the desire of parents to be fully informed of their daughter's progress and to be assured that she was receiving individual care and attention.

5.3.9 THE APPEARANCE OF THE UNIFORM NOT AFFECTING THE
DECISION TO CHOOSE A PARTICULAR SCHOOL:

Item 9. The appearance of the uniform did not influence my decision.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	14.6%	48.8%	4.9%	21.9%	9.8%
School 2	11.1%	59.3%	3.7%	22.2%	3.7%
School 3	13.3%	53.4%	2.2%	28.9%	2.2%
School 4	20.5%	48.7%	7.7%	20.5%	2.6%
School 5	28.9%	48.8%	6.7%	8.9%	6.7%

Responses to Item 9 indicated support for the statement that the appearance of the uniform did not influence choice, with between at least two-thirds of all respondents either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing.

Responses from interviewees related to the uniform reflected the findings of the inventory statement. However, most interviewees commented that they strongly approved of the wearing of a uniform. In only one case, a parent from School 2, was a preference for the particular uniform indicated as a possible minor influence on the decision to choose that school.

Although the appearance of the particular uniform could not be regarded as an influence on choice it may be argued that the enforcement of a uniform was of some significance in choosing between the private school and a government high school.

5.3.10 EVIDENCE OF A CHRISTIAN SPIRIT WITHIN THE SCHOOL

BEING VERY IMPORTANT:

Item 10. Evidence of a Christian spirit within the school was very important.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	29.3%	41.5%	7.3%	19.5%	2.4%
School 2	22.2%	63.0%	7.4%	7.4%	0.0%
School 3	22.2%	55.6%	8.9%	11.1%	2.2%
School 4	30.8%	43.6%	17.9%	7.7%	0.0%
School 5	20.0%	46.7%	13.3%	13.3%	6.7%

Over two-thirds of respondents from all schools agreed that the presence of a Christian spirit within the schools was a very important consideration, with a range of two-thirds from School 5 to 85.2% from School 2, either Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with the statement.

Responses from the interviews supported these findings, although there were some variations. One mother from School 4, a committed Christian, was particularly concerned that by sending her daughter to a private school she was being un-Christian in allowing her daughter to join an elite group. She stated:

"The dilemma is that, as a committed Christian, I don't think kids should withdraw from the government system: that reduces the level of quality - everybody is poorer. The private school is an elitist school - if you don't have

the money you can't go there."

(Interview no. 5)

This mother had, herself, been to a private school but it was her daughter's strong desire to go to a private school that had persuaded her to let her go. She did, however, acknowledge that there was evidence of a working towards Christian values within the school but that less desirable elements, such as snobbery and materialism, were also present (Interview no. 5). One Jewish mother at School 3 considered that, for her daughter, the problem would be meeting the demands of the Anglican school she was attending. After much worrying she was satisfied that her daughter would be able to fit in (Interview no. 8). In most cases the parents saw the presence of the Christian element as important, not because they themselves were practising Christians, but because they had had a Christian upbringing themselves and wanted their daughter to be exposed to its values. One mother commented:

"It's a bonus. I'm happy - it's a valuable experience. Religion is only important in that we are irreligious - it's good to be exposed at school for part of their education. It's a healthy aspect of the school."

(Interview no. 6)

Although there was evidence of a desire for a Christian ethos to be present in the school, it may be argued that this was not so much an affirmation of the importance of

formal religion but the provision of Christian values. To some extent it is also linked with the desire for a caring environment.

5.3.11 EVIDENCE OF CARING FOR THE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF THE STUDENT AS BEING SIGNIFICANT:

Item 11. Evidence of a caring for the emotional well-being of the student was significant.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	48.8%	41.5%	7.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
School 2	44.4%	48.2%	3.7%	3.7%	0.0%	-
School 3	40.0%	48.9%	8.9%	2.2%	0.0%	-
School 4	53.8%	38.5%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	-
School 5	55.6%	42.2%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	-

Statement 11 met with strong agreement from all schools, with a range from 88.9% in School 3 to 97.8% in School 5 either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing that evidence of caring for the emotional well-being of the student was important.

As with evidence of Christian spirit, the response to a caring environment from interviewees supported the findings of the inventory statement. In several instances parents suggested that evidence of pastoral care was an important consideration in choosing the private school rather than a government school. One mother stated:

"Pastoral care is very important - it's good

to know there are people who they can turn to."

(Interview no. 6)

The father in Interview number 15 presented a different view, feeling that there was little evidence that pastoral care programmes could work and he expressed distrust of the house tutor system of pastoral care at School 1. He said

"Pastoral care is a groupy word of the 70's that failed. It's a myth."

(Interview no. 15)

A substantial number of those interviewed suggested that they had hoped to find a caring environment at the school but it wasn't until their daughter started that evidence of its existence emerged.

It is evident that the desire for a caring environment was a very important influence on choice for parents in selecting a private school. It may be argued that parents assume that the private schools have a well developed programme of pastoral care which ensures that individual students are looked after.

5.3.12 EVIDENCE OF FIRM DISCIPLINE AND AN EXPECTATION OF
GOOD BEHAVIOUR BEING IMPORTANT:

Item 12. An important factor was evidence of firm discipline and an expectation of good behaviour.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	70.8%	26.8%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
School 2	51.9%	44.4%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%
School 3	51.1%	42.2%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%
School 4	58.9%	38.5%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%
School 5	55.6%	33.3%	6.7%	4.4%	0.0%

Responses to Item 12 strongly supported the statement with well over four-fifths of all respondents either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing that evidence of firm discipline was important. One parent wrote (in response to Item 26) :

"The possibility of necessary discipline, if students' behaviour prejudices others' standards, was an important reason for choosing a private school."

(School 5, no. 23)

Although interviewed parents did acknowledge that they thought discipline was important it was not considered a vital factor. One mother commented:

"Our children are very good. They don't need a lot of discipline but we wanted a school where there was control."

(Interview no. 15)

It may be argued that the expectation of a disciplined environment was an important influence on parental choice of a private school rather than a government high school. However, for many parents the provision of firm discipline was seen in balance with an expectation of a caring environment.

5.3.13 EVIDENCE OF A STRONG ACADEMIC PROGRAMME BEING AN IMPORTANT FACTOR:

Item 13. Evidence of a strong academic programme was an important factor.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	53.7%	41.5%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%
School 2	48.2%	51.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
School 3	35.6%	53.3%	6.7%	4.4%	0.0%
School 4	58.9%	33.3%	5.2%	2.6%	0.0%
School 5	66.7%	28.9%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%

There was significant support for the statement that a strong academic programme was an important consideration, with almost all respondents agreeing. School 5 had two-thirds Strongly Agreeing compared to School 3 where just over one-third Strongly Agreed. One mother (a teacher at a high school) who had chosen the private school in preference to the local high school said (in response to Item 26):

"More attention is paid to the 'yobbos' at the local high school and their numbers

are increasing, due to the ministry policy to encourage the retention rate. This means that ordinary children are at a disadvantage as we teachers have to teach down to the less motivated, and therefore the other children are not having their needs met. Emphasis on the academic subjects is decreasing while emphasis on the 'Mickey Mouse' subjects is increasing in order to keep the uninterested percentage interested."

(School 2, no. 5)

Interviewee responses reflected the findings from the inventory statement. Several parents pointed out that although they saw academic education as important they felt their daughter could have received as good an academic education in the local high school. It was other factors, not strictly academic, which had led them to choose the private system. One parent commented:

"Academically our daughter would perform well at both schools (government or private). We wanted other things as well."

(Interview no. 4)

In contrast, other parents felt that the private school would provide the best possible academic education. One mother said:

"Academic achievement was top priority."

(Interview no. 6)

Another said:

"The private school would give the best academic, plus the broadening experience of boarding."

(Interview no. 11)

In addition, several mothers expressed concern that, although the academic programme of their local state school was acknowledged to be strong, their reading of literature related to girls' education made them aware of the disadvantages to girls in the co-educational situation (interviews number 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10). A typical comment was:

"I'd done a lot of research - reading on single-sex and problems in co-ed. Private school was it."

(Interview no. 6)

Several comments regarding the value of a single-sex education were made in response to Item 26 in the survey. One mother wrote:

"The school has an excellent reputation for encouraging the students to take maths and sciences, which is not expected

in state schools for female students.
 Female students are not impeded by
 having legitimate concerns regarding
 boys' response if they challenge traditional
 subject and career choices."

(School 2, no. 9)

Another mother wrote:

"As a feminist, it is important to me
 that my daughter receives the best possible
 educational choices so that she can make a real
 choice about who she wants to be."

(School 3, no. 18)

In contrast, another mother wrote:

"I still feel that the single-sex schools tend
 to lag behind in the provision of education for
 the many trades that are now opening up for women.
 They still have the old-fashioned notion of
 turning out academic achievers, and those
 who don't make the grade can always turn to
 business studies and secretarial work. Non
 -provision of woodwork, metal work, tech drawing
 etc is becoming a serious omission."

(Item 26, School 4, no. 11)

Both the open-ended Item 26 and the interviews emphasized
 parental expectation that a good academic programme was

vital to the daughter's choice of a future career. However there was a range in attitude as to whether parents assumed their daughter would go on to tertiary studies. Some comments included:

"Aspirations to tertiary - yes absolutely!

It has always been there - the whole idea of having a worthwhile job has been linked to tertiary education."

(Interview no. 6)

"I ask them to set goals fairly high - they have assumed they are going on."

(Interview no. 14)

"Tertiary? If it's appropriate. I'm prepared to accept it's not the answer to everything - but there is an expectation."

(Interview no. 1)

"We hope our daughters will be confident, well adjusted young adults - become qualified professionals and intelligent mothers."

(Interview no. 12)

It is evident that the desire for a strong academic programme was an important influence on parental choice of the private school. However, for some parents, although the provision of a strong academic programme was important, it was the combination of academic standard and other

extra-curricular opportunities which led them to select a private school. For others it was clear that the academic advantages of a single-sex education for girls were a contributory factor in their selection a single-sex girls' school for their daughter's secondary education.

5.3.14 THE PROMINENT ROLE OF MUSIC BEING A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR:

Item 14. The prominent role of music in the school was a significant factor.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	17.1%	24.4%	24.4%	29.2%	4.9%
School 2	14.8%	59.3%	14.8%	7.4%	3.7%
School 3	8.9%	37.7%	20.0%	26.7%	6.7%
School 4	20.5%	15.4%	23.0%	38.5%	2.6%
School 5	20.0%	46.7%	8.9%	22.2%	2.2%

The response to statement 14 varied considerably from just over one-third in School 4 to nearly three-quarters in School 2 either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing that music was an important consideration in choice of school. Two schools, School 2 and 5, stand out in their responses, indicating the importance of music to them (74.1% and 66.7% combined S.A. and A. respectively).

These findings were reflected in the interviews although two of the parents at School 4 considered that the availability of music had influenced their decision to a

degree. All parents from School 2 indicated that music had been a consideration. One mother said:

"Music - as an extra activity was important.
All our daughters have been doing piano for
some time. I wanted expert tuition."

(Interview no. 12)

It may be argued that the prominent role of music was of some importance to parents in particular schools as an influence on choice but that overall it was not significant.

5.3.15 THE PROMINENT ROLE OF THE CREATIVE ARTS IN THE
SCHOOL WAS NOT SIGNIFICANT:

Item 15. The prominent role of the Creative Arts in the school was not significant.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	4.9%	34.1%	29.3%	26.8%	4.9%	-
School 2	3.7%	29.6%	11.1%	40.8%	11.1%	3.7%
School 3	2.2%	33.3%	26.7%	28.9%	8.9%	-
School 4	0.0%	28.2%	28.2%	38.5%	5.1%	-
School 5	0.0%	33.3%	20.0%	37.8%	8.9%	-

The response to the item about the prominent role of the Creative Arts not being important received a mixed response, ranging from just under a third of parents in School 1 to just over half of parents in School 2 either Disagreeing or Strongly Disagreeing. The number of parents

who were undecided on this issue was quite high, ranging between 11.1% in School 2 to 29.3% in School 1.

The results of the interviews revealed a similar variety of opinions to the inventory statement, with several parents seeing the creative arts as a bonus in the school of their choice but not something which was specifically sought. In some instances the availability of creative opportunities had been actively sought as part of a desire for a rounded, enriching education. One parent expressed the view that although these experiences might be available in local high schools they were dependent on the whim of the staff at the time and not an established part of the school's programme. The mother added:

"My daughter will be in everything totally. She'll extract every ounce the school can offer - a lot of these things are built into private system."

(Interview no. 5)

Another mother commented:

"One thing we wanted was close, instant access to extra-curricular activities like sport, music etc. - we couldn't do that here; being forty kilometres away from the high school."

(Interview no. 12)

It is evident that the role of creative arts in the school was not, in itself, a strong influence on parental choice. However, it may be argued that the existence of such activities as part of the total school programme was an important consideration for parents seeking a well-rounded education for their daughter.

5.3.16 THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL FOR SPORTING
ACHIEVEMENT BEING AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION:

Item 17. The reputation of the school for sporting achievement was an important consideration.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	9.8%	21.9%	21.9%	41.5%	4.9%
School 2	3.7%	25.9%	11.1%	51.9%	7.4%
School 3	4.4%	8.9%	13.4%	71.1%	2.2%
School 4	0.0%	7.7%	12.8%	66.7%	12.8%
School 5	6.7%	22.2%	24.4%	35.6%	11.1%

The response to Item 17 showed a range of reactions from the different schools. Parents from School 1 indicated a mixed response, with almost half either Strongly Disagreeing or Disagreeing, while 21.9% remained undecided about the significance of the school's reputation for sport being a factor. In contrast, over three-quarters of parents from School 4 either Strongly Disagreed or Disagreed with the statement.

The variety of attitudes reflected in the inventory statement were similarly presented in the interviews.

Parents were mostly concerned that the opportunity to play sport was available, rather than feeling strongly about the school's sporting achievements. In one case, Interview number 4, a parent at School 4 expressed disappointment that the sporting opportunities were not as broad as originally hoped. She said:

"I looked at sporting facilities. It's important those five years are happy - I did a lot of sport. I've been a little disappointed; most of the sport is before and after school and is voluntary. They have phys. ed. - all else is extra. The Year 8^s have taken a while to cotton-on."

(Interview no. 4)

In contrast, the mother of a student at School 1 expressed concern that the school placed too much pressure on students to train rigorously for the swimming team.

It is evident that the reputation of the school for sport is not, in itself, a consideration for parents in choosing a private school. However, it is possible to make a case that, as for creative arts, it is the provision of these activities and the opportunity to be involved in them, which is important to a well-rounded education.

5.3.17 AN AWARENESS OF A COMPETENT TEACHING STAFF BEING IMPORTANT:

Item 18. Awareness of a competent teaching staff was important.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	29.3%	58.5%	9.8%	2.4%	0.0%
School 2	40.7%	59.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
School 3	37.7%	55.6%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%
School 4	41.0%	51.3%	5.1%	2.6%	0.0%
School 5	55.6%	40.0%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%

There was strong agreement to Item 18, with almost all respondents either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing to the statement that an awareness of a competent teaching staff was important. Of significance is the fact that over half of parents in School 5 Strongly Agreed with the statement, a figure well above any other school.

Interview responses revealed a slightly different emphasis than that established by the inventory statement responses. In all but one of the 15 interviews, parents indicated that they had basically assumed that the teaching staff were competent. Not one of those interviewed had made more than a superficial enquiry about the nature and qualification of the staff. The overall reputation of the school was enough to satisfy them as to the quality of the staff. One typical comment was:

"We expected the staff to be dedicated.

It's interesting: if staff stay too

long in a particular government school
you think they're vegetating; in the
private system it's comforting."

(Interview no. 11)

Another mother commented:

"I guess it's more the Head who's in control.
She's good, so you expect the staff to be good."

(Interview no. 8)

Another mother commented:

"We expect the staff to be the best and
suitably qualified and assumed this
would be the case."

(Interview no. 12)

Exceptions to this were a parent of a student at School 1
(Interview no. 14) who expressed concern about the way
staff were appointed at the school, suggesting that very
often positions were given to individuals who had a vested
interest in the school, such as someone with a daughter
attending the school. A father from the same school who
said:

"We didn't look at a staff profile.
My feeling is that private schools
attract conservative and old staff."

(Interview no. 15)

Otherwise, those interviewed had taken little interest in the nature of the staff.

Despite their assumption of a good teaching staff interviewees did expect competent staff. One mother, a secondary school-teacher, commented:

"We both wanted expert tuition for their core subjects. We expect the staff to be the best and suitably qualified."

(Interview no. 12)

It is evident that there is an expectation of a competent teaching staff being present in a private school. However, there is evidence to indicate that this quality is assumed by parents to be part of the system. The principal is perceived to be responsible for ensuring the provision of a competent and dedicated teaching staff.

5.3.18 ATTITUDES TOWARDS EVIDENCE OF SMALL CLASS SIZES BEING AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION:

Item 19. Evidence of small class sizes was an important factor.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	36.6%	41.5%	14.6%	7.3%	0.0%	-
School 2	29.6%	66.7%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	-
School 3	35.6%	48.9%	4.4%	8.9%	0.0%	2.2%
School 4	38.5%	61.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-
School 5	33.3%	48.9%	15.6%	2.2%	0.0%	-

There was strong support from parents in all schools in respect of the significance of small class sizes being an important consideration. The most supportive of this factor was School 4 where all respondents either Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the statement compared with School 1 where 78.1% responded similarly.

Interviewees' responses to this item did not reflect the same total commitment to the importance of class size as indicated in the results of the inventory statement. Generally, those interviewed tended to feel that small class sizes were to be taken for granted. One mother commented:

"The size of class was not an issue - we assumed they would be reasonable."

(Interview no. 12)

Despite the general level of agreement to the statement, the interviews indicated that class size was not of any particular importance as a factor in parents' decision.

5.3.19 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SCHOOL'S REPUTATION FOR PROVIDING A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION BEING IMPORTANT:

Item 20. The school's reputation for providing a well-rounded education was important.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	53.7%	39.0%	2.4%	4.9%	0.0%
School 2	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
School 3	57.8%	37.8%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%
School 4	71.8%	28.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
School 5	68.9%	28.9%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%

Almost all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school's reputation for providing a well-rounded education was important.

Interviewees' responses strongly supported this statement. In many cases parents noted that although the expectation of a strong academic programme was important, this could often be found in the local government school but the attraction of a well-rounded education catering for the whole child, was appealing. Several comments reflecting this attitude included:

"I liked the feeling that it seemed to me that they would foster anything - whatever they were good at, whether it was sport, theatre etc."

(Interview no. 1)

"I wanted them to be able to take part in
whatever they wanted to."

(Interview no. 6)

"We're hoping she'll get an all-round
education"

(Interview no. 9)

Parents appear to be seeking a well-rounded education for their daughters , one which encompasses both a strong academic programme and the opportunity to be involved in a range of educational experiences.

5.3.20 WHETHER THE DAUGHTER'S VIEWS DID NOT INFLUENCE THE
DECISION:

Item 21. Your daughter's views did not influence your
decision.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	7.3%	34.2%	7.3%	31.7%	19.5%	-
School 2	3.7%	33.3%	3.7%	55.6%	3.7%	-
School 3	6.7%	15.6%	4.4%	51.1%	22.2%	-
School 4	0.0%	10.3%	15.4%	61.5%	12.8%	-
School 5	4.4%	44.5%	4.4%	31.1%	13.4%	2.2%

There was a mixed response to this item between the different schools. School 4 showed that almost three-quarters of parents either Strongly Disagreed or Disagreed with the statement while School 5 had almost a half in the same categories. Parents from Schools 3 and 4 stand out as

indicating that daughters had some say in the choice of their school (73.3% and 74.4% respectively).

The Interviews reinforced these results concerning the daughter's influence. In two instances, one from School 3 and one from School 4, the mothers made it clear that it was the daughters who insisted on attending the private school rather than the local government school. In contrast, it was clearly evident that parents mostly made the decision for daughters in Schools 1 and 5, although the parents did indicate that the subject had been discussed with their daughters.

It is considered that, in particular schools, the daughter's opinion has some weight in the choice of school.

5.3.21 THE SCHOOL BEING RECOMMENDED BY SOMEONE WHOSE OPINION WAS VALUED:

Item 22. The school was recommended to me by someone whose opinion I value.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
School 1	12.2%	36.6%	12.2%	31.7%	7.3%	-
School 2	11.1%	40.8%	0.0%	33.3%	11.1%	3.7%
School 3	6.7%	44.4%	6.7%	33.3%	8.9%	-
School 4	10.3%	53.8%	0.0%	28.2%	7.7%	-
School 5	17.8%	26.7%	11.1%	31.1%	13.3%	-

There was a mixed response to statement 22, with responses ranging from 44.5% of parents at School 5 to almost two-

thirds of parents at School 4 either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing with the statement. Recommendations were important to approximately half the parents sampled.

The comments made during the interviews regarding this item varied. Parents at School 1 indicated that they had sought other opinions but had not been particularly influenced. The parents at School 2 who were interviewed were not influenced by the opinions of others, although family tradition contributed to the decision for one family, while national sentiment influenced another. Parents at School 3 did not feel they had been influenced by the opinions of others, rather they felt they had made the decision themselves. In contrast, two of the parents at School 4 had sought the opinion of all those they knew who were associated with the school in coming to a decision (interviews number 4 and 6). One mother commented:

"I checked it out through parents I knew.
I grilled them - always adding to the
picture."

(Interview no. 6)

Parents from School 5 were mixed in their response with only one mother admitting to seeking opinions from friends due largely to the fact that she was making the difficult decision to transfer her daughter from another private school and wanted to be absolutely sure it was the right decision (Interview no. 1).

Item 23. If SA or A apply to Item 22, please state the basis of the person's knowledge of the school.

School:		1	2	3	4	5
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS						
<u>Source 1</u>						
(No of responses:	20	14	23	24	20)	
Current or ex-student	25.0%	64.3%	47.8%	20.8%	10.0%	
Parent of attending or ex-pupil	50.0%	28.6%	47.8%	58.3%	70.0%	
Teacher with knowledge of the school	25.0%	7.1%	4.4%	20.9%	20.0%	
<u>Source 2</u>						
(No of responses:	5	3	6	7	2)	
Current or ex-student	-	-	16.7%	14.3%	-	
Parent of attending or ex-pupil	60.0%	100.0%	83.3%	57.2%	50.0%	
Teacher with knowledge of the school	40.0%	-	-	28.5%	50.0%	

Item 23 sought to identify the nature of those people who had influenced parents in their choice of a school. Those who acted on recommendations were largely influenced by either a current or ex-student or the parent of an attending or ex-pupil. At School 1, 62.5% of the sample group had had the school recommended. Of these, 50% of the recommendations were from the parent of an attending pupil or ex-pupil. This situation was similarly reflected in Schools 3, 4 and 5 where the major group which recommended the school were parents of attending or ex-pupils. The major group responsible for recommendation of School 2 were current or ex-students.

It is evident that, in the main, where parents seek advice about a school they talk to people who have had direct experience of the school.

5.3.22 THE LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL, IN RELATION TO AN
INDEPENDENT BOYS' SCHOOL, INFLUENCING THE DECISION:

Item 24. The location of the school, in relation to an independent boys' school, influenced my decision.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
School 1	7.3%	12.2%	7.3%	56.1%	17.1%
School 2	0.0%	18.5%	3.7%	51.9%	25.9%
School 3	2.2%	4.4%	8.9%	51.2%	33.3%
School 4	12.8%	7.7%	20.5%	33.3%	25.7%
School 5	4.4%	6.7%	11.1%	48.9%	28.9%

The overall response to Item 24 strongly rejected the proposition that the location of a boys' school had any influence over the decision. In School 3, 84.5% either Strongly Disagreed or Disagreed with the statement while, at the other end of the range, 59% of parents at School 4 felt similarly. However, 20.5% of parents at School 4 either Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the statement.

The responses during the interviews reflected the overall response to the statement. In two instances families had, sent their son to the local government school (School 3 and School 4). Nevertheless, in the open responses to Item 25, there were several instances where parents of students at School 4 listed location near a boys' school as important.

It would seem that, as an influence on choice, location near a boys' school is unimportant for the majority of parents. However, it appears that it might be of significance for parents in some particular schools.

5.4 SUMMARY OF THE LIKERT SCALE RESPONSES TO THE INVENTORY OF STATEMENTS

The responses to the inventory of statements using the Likert scale were summarized using the scaling method described in Chapter 4 (Section 4.6) and expressed as the mean agreement/disagreement score for the item (Table 5.2). Because the responses were scaled over the range 5 to 1, a score of 5 would indicate that 100% of the respondents strongly agreed, while a score of 1 would indicate that 100% strongly disagreed. Intermediate values indicate a level of agreement or disagreement between these extremes.

Some questions, however, were phrased in the negative, so that a low agreement/disagreement score would indicate a high level of disagreement with the statement, which is interpretable as a high level of agreement with the positive form of the statement. To consider how these negatively phrased statements ranked in relation to the positively phrased statements, the agreement/disagreement score was recalculated using an inverted form of the calculation described in the data analysis (section 4.6). For these statements the agreement/disagreement score was calculated by assigning values from 5 for Strongly Disagree through to 1 for Strongly Agree. Converted items in Table 5.2 are marked with an asterisk.

Table 5.2Mean agreement/disagreement scores for items in the inventory of statements.

(5 = 100% strongly agree ; 1 = 100% strongly disagree)

Item	<u>School</u>				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	2.6	2.4	2.9	3.4	2.8
2	2.3	3.6	2.3	2.0	2.9
3	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.4	4.5
4*	2.5	2.9	3.3	3.0	2.7
5	3.5	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.5
6*	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.7	2.7
7	4.0	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.0
8	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2
9*	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.2
10	3.6	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.6
11	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.5	4.5
12	4.6	4.4	4.4	4.6	4.4
13	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.5	4.6
14	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.6
15*	2.9	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.2
17	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.2	2.8
18	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.5
19	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.1
20	4.4	4.6	4.5	4.7	4.7
21*	3.2	3.2	3.7	3.8	3.0
22	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.0
24	2.4	2.1	1.9	2.5	2.1

(* - Agreement/disagreement scores calculated using the inverted form so that the value is equivalent to the response to a positively phrased statement.)

Table 5.3

Rank order of agreement/disagreement scores for items in the inventory of statements (Top 5 ranked items).

	<u>School</u>				
	1	2	3	4	5
<u>Rank</u>					
1	Firm discipline	Well-rounded	Well-rounded	Well-rounded	Well-rounded
2	Reputation	Reputation	Firm discipline	Firm discipline	Strong academic
3	Caring	Strong academic	Reputation	Caring	Reputation
4	Strong academic	Firm discipline	Caring	Strong academic	Caring
5	Well-rounded	Competent staff	Competent staff / Class size	Reputation	Competent staff

The top 5 ranked items from Table 5.2 are shown in Table 5.3. The table shows that there was much common ground between the parents of the different schools in the ranking of the most important items affecting choice, although there was some variation in the ranking. The desire for a well-rounded education was the prime item, with the expectation of the school having a good reputation also holding a high ranking across most schools. The desire for both a disciplined and caring environment was evident in most schools. Only in School 5 was discipline not ranked in the top five items, while School 2 did not include the desire for a caring environment. The importance of the schools providing a strong academic programme and possessing competent staff were important, with only School

3 not ranking academic programme and Schools 1 and 4 not highlighting the importance of staff.

5.5 ACADEMIC PRIORITIES

Item 16 asked parents to list, in order of priority, four aspects of the school's academic programme which were important to them. The responses, up to the maximum of four, were scaled from 4 to 1 and an accumulated score for each category of response calculated as described in the data analysis section (Section 4.6). The accumulated score was then converted to a score out of 100, based on the total accumulated score for that school.

Table 5.4 shows some interesting differences in the parent's underlying priorities for the various academic areas in the different schools. Mathematics is clearly important to many parents as it ranks as the first priority in four schools. School 5, however, shows a significantly stronger commitment to mathematics compared with the other schools ($X^2 = 9.63$, $p < 0.05$ $df = 4$). Science, although not as strong as mathematics, was highly ranked as a priority in four of the five schools. The results for School 2 were different, with parents ranking variety of subjects and languages well ahead of mathematics and science. Variety of subjects was fairly highly ranked in most schools, but was significantly more important in School 2 ($X^2 = 10.23$, $p < 0.05$ $df=4$).

Table 5.4

Accumulated scores for academic priorities in choice of school

School No.:	1	2	3	4	5
Accumulated score (Converted to a value out of 100)					
Mathematics	11.9	5.6	13.7	11.7	18.8
Science	7.4	3.3	10.3	8.6	12.8
English	6.1	2.3	11.0	7.0	5.5
Music	3.2	3.3	4.5	7.8	7.9
Competitive environment providing an opportunity to excel	7.7	7.0	3.8	1.9	7.3
Academic opportunities open to all students	3.5	2.8	2.4	5.8	4.0
Languages	7.4	10.3	6.2	6.2	3.3
Variety of subjects	10.3	22.4	11.7	8.6	8.8
Evidence of academic excellence	6.7	9.8	2.1	7.4	7.6
Quality of staff	1.0	3.7	2.4	3.1	2.4
Extra-curricular subjects/options	2.2	2.3	1.0	1.6	1.8
No unit curriculum	6.1	3.7	5.2	4.7	-
Special needs catered for	3.2	0.9	1.7	1.9	2.7
Small class size	2.6	4.2	3.8	6.6	2.4
Balanced curriculum	3.8	7.0	3.8	2.7	0.9
Computing	2.9	1.9	3.4	1.6	2.4
Accountability	1.9	-	-	1.6	-
Business studies	0.6	-	0.3	-	1.8
Humanities	-	-	2.7	1.2	0.6
Cultural/"Arts"	-	-	-	1.2	2.4
Non-academic reasons	11.5	9.3	10.0	8.9	6.4

The number of people who listed a non-academic reason in their list of priorities in all schools indicated a lack of understanding of the term "academic" which was not revealed in the trialling.

The areas which parents highlighted in their four choices concentrated on mathematics, science and variety. In two schools (4 and 5) music was considered important while languages were of importance to parents in Schools 1 and 2.

5.6 THE FACTORS WHICH MOST INFLUENCED THE CHOICE OF A PARTICULAR SCHOOL

Item 25 asked parents to list, in order of priority, the factors which most influenced them to choose the particular school. Four spaces were made available for completion and the accumulated score for each category determined and converted to a score out of 100 (Table 5.5)(see Section 4.6 - Data analysis).

An examination of Table 5.5 reveals the diversity of the concerns of parents when choosing a particular school. With the exception of receipt of a scholarship, identified previously (Fig. 3.1) as an extraneous variable, none of the other variables identified from this open-ended item could be considered as an extraneous variables. Among the intervening and antecedent variables noted by parents there is clearly some common ground. In order to gain a clearer picture of the most important priorities Table 5.6 illustrates the top four priorities in each of the schools in rank order.

An examination of Table 5.6 reveals some common factors between the schools but there are also some distinctive differences. The desire for a high standard academic programme was common to the top four priorities of four of the schools, with parents from School 3 listing it overall as fifth in priority.

Table 5.5

Accumulated scores for overall priorities in choice of school

School No.:	1	2	3	4	5
Accumulated score (Converted to a value out of 100)					
High academic standard	15.1	13.0	7.4	16.1	21.7
Social aspects	4.2	4.0	-	-	2.3
Extra-curricular/cultural (excl. music)	1.7	-	1.3	1.8	1.0
Music	0.8	2.0	0.8	5.0	4.2
Extra-curricular/non-cultural (inc. sport)	2.5	2.0	0.5	0.6	1.8
Christian ethos	3.9	3.6	2.0	8.5	3.8
Physical resources	5.6	3.6	1.5	4.7	1.0
Discipline	8.7	5.3	6.6	4.7	3.8
Physical and emotional care	9.5	9.7	7.6	4.1	6.5
Family relationship with school	5.3	14.6	3.6	4.1	9.0
Physical position	10.6	2.8	12.5	14.6	3.3
School's reputation	8.7	8.5	14.0	7.0	9.7
Single-sex education	1.7	5.3	2.3	2.9	2.8
Well-rounded education	3.1	5.3	1.0	2.3	5.0
"Tone" of the school	5.0	2.0	2.3	-	7.2
Boarding facilities/environment	6.1	8.9	2.8	3.2	2.5
Close to boys' school/ sister school	1.4	0.4	1.8	6.7	1.0
Receipt of a scholarship	1.1	-	-	-	1.0
Child's wish to attend	0.8	1.6	1.8	-	1.8
Uniform	-	0.8	0.3	-	-
Staff	1.1	3.6	4.8	4.7	4.0
School caters to special needs	0.6	-	-	0.3	1.5
Small classes	0.8	1.6	4.3	0.9	1.8
Principal	1.4	1.2	6.1	2.6	1.3
Size of school	-	-	10.7	3.8	-
No unit curriculum	0.3	-	-	-	-
Female role models	-	-	0.5	-	-
Traditions	-	-	1.8	-	0.5
Feminism	-	-	0.8	-	-
Rejection of government schools	-	-	1.0	0.6	-
School administration	-	-	-	0.9	1.8

Table 5.6

Top four overall priorities in rank order

	<u>School</u>				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	Academic Standard	Family Relationship	Reputation	Academic Standard	Academic Standard
2	Physical Position	Academic Standard	Physical Position	Physical Position	Reputation
3	Physical & Emotional Care	Physical & Emotional Care	Size of School	Christian Ethos	Family Relationship
4	Discipline	Reputation	Physical & Emotional Care	Reputation	"Tone"

School 5 parents showed a stronger preference for a high academic standard with an overall score of 21.7, compared with as little as 7.4 for School 3. The perceived good reputation of the school was common to four of the schools - ranking as the first priority for School 3. Physical and emotional care was common to three of the schools, as was the physical position of the school. Physical position ranked as second priority for parents from Schools 1, 3 and 4. Family relationship with the school ranked as the top priority for parents at School 2 and was important for parents at School 5. The size of the school was only important to School 3 parents while Christian ethos and discipline, both ranked highly in the studies cited in the Literature Review, were in the top four priorities overall only for School 4 and School 1 respectively. "Tone" -

defined as the feeling or mood within the school was only ranked in the top four for School 5.

It may be argued that there are several variables of choice common to all schools but that, in addition, particular variables exist which are only influences on choice in individual schools.

5.7 FURTHER COMMENTS

Item 26 was an open-ended, giving parents the opportunity to comment further on any aspects of their choice. Table 5.7 shows the nature and percentage frequency of the responses.

Many parents took this opportunity to express their belief that they had made the right choice with School 5 standing out in the number and percentage of parents expressing satisfaction with the school. There was a strong affirmation of the caring environment provided from parents in Schools 2, 3 and 4 while a number of parents from School 1 commented on the quality of the academic programme and their desire for a disciplined environment (Comment no. 2).

Table 5.7

Categorized comments in response to Item 26

	<u>COMMENT No.: 1</u>				
	School No.: 1	2	3	4	5
	(No. of responses: 15	12	16	12	22)
	(Percentage of total responses: 36.6	44.4	35.6	30.8	48.9)
<u>PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS</u>					
<u>Positive comments</u>					
Delighted/Happy/Excellent choice	26.6	25.0	18.7	16.7	54.4
Discipline/Behaviour	-	-	-	-	4.6
Caring	-	16.7	12.4	16.7	-
Commitment of teachers	-	-	-	-	4.6
Nature of student body	-	-	6.3	-	-
Good boarding facilities/Caring boarding staff	-	8.3	-	-	4.6
Quality of academic programme	20.0	8.3	-	8.3	13.4
Disillusionment with government system	-	16.7	12.4	25.0	4.6
Positive impressions of the school and the Principal	-	8.3	6.3	-	4.6
Individual attention/View	13.3	8.3	18.7	-	-
Particular subject choice	-	-	6.3	-	-
Values - particularly Christian	-	-	6.3	-	-
Self-esteem developed	-	-	6.3	-	-
Single-sex	-	-	6.3	-	-
Distance	6.7	-	-	16.7	-
No unit curriculum	-	-	-	8.3	-
<u>Negative comments</u>					
Lack of feminine graces being taught	-	8.3	-	-	4.6
Broader range of life skills (e.g. woodwork, metalwork)	-	-	-	-	4.6
need to be taught	-	-	-	-	4.6
Forcing students into particular streams	6.7	-	-	-	-
Lack of caring towards all students	6.7	-	-	8.3	-
Lack of a particular extra-curricular choice	20.0	-	-	-	-

Table 5.7 (cont'd)

		<u>COMMENT No.: 2</u>				
School No.:		1	2	3	4	5
(No. of responses:		8	7	11	7	13)
(Percentage of total responses:		19.5	25.9	24.4	17.9	28.9)
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS						
<u>Positive comments</u>						
Delighted/Happy/Excellent choice	12.5	-	-	-	-	-
Extra curricula opportunities	-	-	-	-	-	7.7
Discipline/Behaviour	25.0	-	9.1	-	-	7.7
Caring	-	28.6	18.2	28.7	23.1	-
Providing motivation	12.5	-	-	-	-	15.3
Commitment of teachers	-	14.3	18.2	14.3	23.1	-
Nature of student body	-	-	9.1	14.3	7.7	-
Good boarding facilities/Caring boarding staff	25.0	14.3	-	14.3	-	-
Quality of academic programme	-	28.5	-	14.3	7.7	-
Disillusionment with government system	-	-	-	-	-	7.7
Positive impressions of the school and the Principal	12.5	-	9.1	-	-	-
Individual attention/View	-	-	9.1	-	-	-
Particular subject choice	-	-	-	-	-	-
Values - particularly Christian	-	-	27.2	-	-	-
Single-sex	12.5	14.3	-	-	-	-
<u>Negative comment</u>						
Broader range of life skills (e.g. woodwork, metalwork) need to be taught	-	-	-	14.3	-	-

5.8 CROSS TABULATION OF THE BACKGROUND DATA WITH THE LIKERT
SCALE RESPONSES TO ITEMS IN THE INVENTORY.

This analysis attempted to determine whether or not, for each school, there were factors in the background information which were associated with the Likert scale responses to items in the inventory. Factors examined were:

1. The secondary educational experience of the parents (both, one - and whether mother or father - or neither parent attending a private school for secondary education) against the influence of the daughter's views on the decision (Item 21).
2. The tertiary educational experience of the parents (both, one - and whether mother or father - or neither parent having a tertiary qualification) against the importance of evidence of a strong academic programme (Item 13).
3. The tertiary educational experience of the parents (both, one - and whether mother or father - or neither parent having a tertiary qualification) against the importance of the physical appearance of the school (Item 6).
4. The distance which day girls lived from the school against the importance of proximity (Item 1).

Due, however, to the presence of low and missing values in many of the cells in all cross tabulations, the frequency data were not suited to chi square analysis. Instead, the results are presented (Tables 5.8a - d) as the mean agreement/disagreement score for each category in the background data, after converting the Likert scale responses to numerical values (SA = 5 to SD = 1) (Section 4.6, Data Analysis).

Table 5.8
Mean agreement/disagreement scores for the Likert scale responses to Items 21, 13, 6 & 1 by background category.

(5 = 100% strongly agree ; 1 = 100% strongly disagree)

Table 5.8a
Item 21. Secondary educational experience of the parents vs. The influence of the daughter's views on the decision.

	Private education			
	Both Parents	Mother Only	Father Only	Neither Parent
School 1	3.0	2.4	3.1	2.5
School 2	3.3	2.5	2.4	2.6
School 3	3.1	2.4	2.7	1.9
School 4	2.0	2.0	2.4	2.3
School 5	3.0	2.4	2.8	3.2

The analysis indicates that at most schools, where neither or only one parent had a private school education the item was generally disagreed with. Taking into account that this was a negatively phrased question the data indicates that, in fact, the daughter's views did influence these

parents. At School 5, where neither parent had a private school education and with privately educated fathers at School 1, it appears that the daughters had less influence in the decision making. Where both parents had a private school education it was only in School 4 that daughters had an influence in the choice of their school.

In general, the data indicated that where neither or only one parent has had a private school education the daughter is more likely to have an influence on the choice of her school.

Table 5.8b

Item 13. Tertiary education of the parents vs.Importance of a strong academic programme.

	Tertiary education			
	Both Parents	Mother Only	Father Only	Neither Parent
School 1	4.8	4.3	4.3	4.3
School 2	4.7	4.4	4.3	4.4
School 3	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.3
School 4	4.7	4.7	4.4	4.3
School 5	4.8	4.4	4.6	4.6

The data indicates that the presence or absence of a tertiary background has no major influence on parental attitudes to the importance of a strong academic programme.

Table 5.8c

Item 6. Tertiary education of the parents vs. The importance of the physical appearance of the school.

	Tertiary education			
	Both Parents	Mother Only	Father Only	Neither Parent
School 1	2.9	1.8	3.3	2.7
School 2	3.1	2.5	3.3	2.7
School 3	2.6	3.0	3.2	2.9
School 4	2.5	2.0	2.6	2.0
School 5	3.8	2.5	3.4	3.0

The statement concerning the importance of the physical appearance of the school was posed in the negative. The data suggests that at School 5, where both parents had a tertiary education, the appearance of the school was of least importance. However, at School 1, where only the mother had a private school education, the physical appearance was of most importance. At School 4, parents in all categories generally considered the appearance of the school to be of some importance.

Table 5.8d

Item 1. Distance of home from school vs Proximity to the school being important.

	Distance from school			
	0 - 5 km	6 - 10 km	11 - 20 km	>20 km
School 1	4.0	3.8	2.4	-
School 2	3.3	3.0	1.3	-
School 3	3.9	3.6	3.1	2.0
School 4	4.1	3.8	3.3	2.0
School 5	4.0	2.8	2.4	2.1

The data suggests that, at all schools, attitudes to the importance of proximity are correlated with the distance of home from the school. Parents living close to the respective school considered proximity important while those living further away put less importance on this factor. However, at all schools, except School 3, the bulk of students were drawn from within a 10 kilometre range. This suggests there may be parents who do not send their daughters to particular schools because of distance.

5.9 FACTOR ANALYSIS OF ITEMS WITH LIKERT SCALE RESPONSES

Factor analysis was undertaken to provide a description of the overall characteristics of the sample group. The initial principal component analysis of the factor analysis revealed that there were eight factors with eigenvalues greater than one. However, only Factor 1 was clearly separated from the other seven factors by the amount of the variance which it explained (Table 5.9). Factor 1 explained 17.7% of the variance while Factors 2 to 8 only explained between 8.4 and 4.8% of the variance respectively. Because of the relatively large amount of variance explained by Factor 1, and the relatively small differences in the amounts of the variance explained by the other factors, only Factor 1 was considered to be useful in characterizing the sample.

Table 5.9

Variance explained by the first eight factors (i.e. factors with eigenvalues > 1)

Factor	Eigenvalue	Propn. Var. Explained	Cum. Propn Var. Explained
1	3.8961	0.1771	0.1771
2	1.8474	0.0840	0.2611
3	1.5121	0.0687	0.3298
4	1.3787	0.0627	0.3925
5	1.2633	0.0574	0.4499
6	1.1789	0.0536	0.5035
7	1.1301	0.0514	0.5548
8	1.0470	0.0476	0.0624

Following the initial factor extraction by principal component analysis, the factors were subjected to varimax rotation to simplify their factor structure. The loadings associated with each variable of Factor 1 after varimax rotation are listed in Table 5.10 and the top seven variables associated with Factor 1 (those with factor loadings greater than 0.5) are listed in rank order in Table 5.11.

The factor analysis reported here describes the total sample group. It does not attempt to discriminate between schools because the sample size was insufficient for each school to be dealt with separately by factor analysis in a valid statistical manner. However, the factor analysis of all schools combined revealed seven variables as being important components of the one major factor describing the sample population. The variables associated with Factor 1 indicate that it could be summarized as factor characterized as a concern for the whole emotional and academic welfare of the student.

Table 5.10

Factor loadings for variables in factor 1 after varimax rotation

Variable	Factor loading
Item 1	0.0959
Item 2	0.0467
Item 3	0.5624
Item 4	0.0462
Item 5	0.2668
Item 6	-0.0299
Item 7	0.3805
Item 8	0.6821
Item 9	0.0646
Item10	0.4305
Item11	0.7257
Item12	0.6718
Item13	0.5989
Item14	0.2086
Item15	0.0565
Item17	0.1123
Item18	0.5736
Item19	0.4727
Item20	0.7303
Item21	-0.0557
Item22	0.0698
Item24	-0.1688

attitude" (Burrell,1981), and "Moral values" (Morrison, 1983).

5.10 CANONICAL VARIATE ANALYSIS OF ITEMS WITH LIKERT SCALE RESPONSES

The canonical variate analysis reduced the variables in the data set to four canonical variates. Determination of the significance of these canonical variates is by consideration of the significance of the amount of the variance explained by each canonical variate (F test). The first two canonical variates, which together explained 72.6% of the variance (Table 5.12), were the only significant variates ($p < 0.05$, F test).

Table 5.12
Variance explained by the four canonical variates

Can. Var.	Eigenvalue	Propn. Var. Explained	Cum. Propn Var. Explained
1	0.4866	0.4497	0.4497
2	0.2987	0.2760	0.7257
3	0.1899	0.1755	0.9012
4	0.1069	0.0988	1.0000

The class means for each school on canonical variates 1 and 2 are presented in Table 5.13 and graphically as a scattergram in Figure 5.1.

Table 5.13Class Means for canonical variates 1 and 2.

School:	1	2	3	4	5
Can. Var. 1:-0.1071	0.7975	-0.2293	-1.0816	0.7858	
Can. Var. 2: 0.8093	-0.5069	-0.6844	0.0202	0.2336	

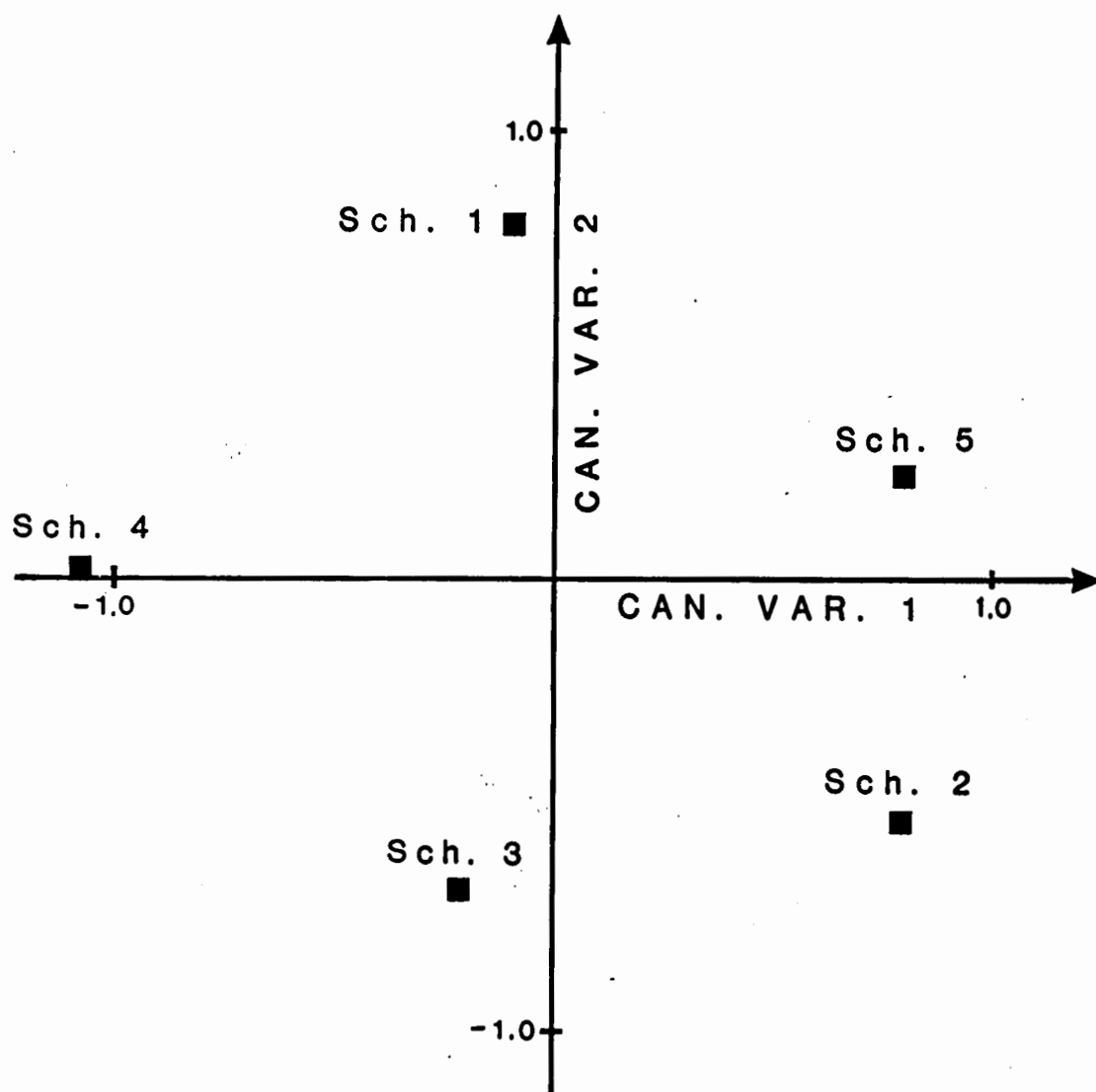
The standardized canonical coefficients for canonical variates 1 and 2 are presented in Table 5.14. These coefficients are used to characterize the canonical variates. The variables with the higher absolute values of the standardized canonical coefficients are the ones which are of greatest importance in characterizing the canonical variate.

Table 5.14Standardized canonical coefficients for canonical variates 1 and 2.

Variable	Can. Var. 1	Can. Var. 2
Item 1	-0.2683	-0.0287
Item 2	0.6264	-0.2707
Item 3	0.0842	0.3954
Item 4	0.0654	0.4042
Item 5	0.0173	-0.4704
Item 6	0.4891	-0.3018
Item 7	-0.2063	-0.0649
Item 8	0.1523	-0.4534
Item 9	-0.0786	-0.0615
Item10	-0.1560	-0.3675
Item11	0.0786	0.5451
Item12	-0.3240	0.1985
Item13	0.2624	0.3487
Item14	0.2344	0.0319
Item15	-0.0446	0.2110
Item17	0.2515	0.3986
Item18	0.2570	-0.2913
Item19	-0.1567	0.0019
Item20	-0.2417	-0.1796
Item21	0.1883	0.2172
Item22	-0.1536	0.0134
Item24	-0.2581	0.4601

Figure 5.1

Scattergram of the class means for canonical variates 1 & 2



Key to Axes

Emotional well-being of the student - important
 Students' behaviour in community - not important
 Location with respect to an independent boys' school - important
 Good communication channels - not important
 Size of the school population - not important

↑
 →

Family member attended - important
 Physical appearance - not important
 Discipline/behaviour - not important
 Close proximity - not important
 Strong academic programme - important

The sign associated with the canonical coefficient for each variable relates to the influence of the variable for positive values of the canonical variate. The nature of the top five variables associated with high, positive canonical variate scores on canonical variates 1 and 2 are listed in rank order in Table 5.15. However, the interpretation of the nature of the variables comprising the two canonical variates requires examination of the phrasing of the statement (i.e.: positive or negative phrasing) and the sign of the canonical coefficient (i.e.: positive or negative value). A positive canonical coefficient indicates that the statement was generally agreed to by parents at schools with the high positive canonical variate scores, while a negative coefficient indicates that it was generally disagreed with. However, with statements which were negatively phrased, a negative coefficient indicates that the statement was disagreed with, which is interpretable as the positive form of the statement being agreed with.

The canonical variate scores of Schools 2 and 5, which both have high, positive scores on canonical variate 1, indicate that they are characterized by the variables associated with high, positive scores on canonical variate 1 (Table 5.15). School 4, with the highest negative value on canonical variate 1, is most dissimilar to Schools 2 and 5 in these variables. Schools 1 and 3 are similar to each other in the variables associated with canonical variate 1 and approximately midway between School 4 and Schools 2 and

Table 5.15

Interpretation of the nature of the first five variables of canonical variates 1 and 2 for schools with high, positive canonical variate scores.

Canonical Variate 1		
Rank	Variable	Stand. Can. Coeff.
1	Family member attended the school - important consideration (Item 2)	0.6264
2	The physical appearance of the school - not important (Item 6)	0.4891
3	Evidence of firm discipline and an expectation of good behaviour - not important (Item 12)	-0.3240
4	Close proximity to the school - not a major consideration (Item 1)	-0.2683
5	Evidence of a strong academic programme - important (Item 13)	0.2624
Canonical Variate 2		
Rank	Variable	Stand. Can. Coeff.
1	Caring for the emotional well-being of the student - important (Item 11)	0.5451
2	Observing the school's students' behaviour in community - not important (Item 5)	-0.4704
3	Location in relation to an independent boys' school - important (Item 24)	0.4601
4	Evidence of good communication channels between parents and school - not important (Item 8)	-0.4534
5	Size of the school population - not important (Item 4)	0.4042

5. Both Schools 1 and 3 and 2 and 5 are, however, separated by the variables associated with canonical variate 2. School 1, with the highest positive score on canonical variate 2, is characterized by the variables associated with high, positive scores on canonical variate 2 (Table 5.15). Schools 2 and 3 are most dissimilar to

School 1 in these respects, while School 5 is midway between these extremes.

5.11 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The analyses of the data identified single and composite variables which influenced parental choice of a private school. The relative importance of these variables is discussed in Chapter six.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 OVERVIEW

In discussing the significance of the findings it is appropriate to recall the initial conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) and consider to what extent the variables identified can be substantiated. In addition it was found that other factors and combinations of factors, not identified by previous studies, emerged as significant variables in parental choice of a particular independent girls' school.

6.2 SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES UPON CHOICE OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL

6.2.1 WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

No studies in the literature which was reviewed specified a well-rounded education as a factor of parental choice, although Tannock (1972) listed "emphasis on well-rounded personality" and Burrell (1981) ranks "development of mind and character" as factors, both of which could be associated loosely with the concept of a well-rounded education. In the present study well-rounded education was defined to encompass the expectations of both a good academic programme and the opportunity to be exposed to a range of educational experiences.

Parents' desires for a well-rounded education for their daughters were strongly expressed. In the ranking of the Likert scale responses, four of the five schools listed this item as number one (it was placed equal third for School 1). In the factor analysis of the whole sample group, the desire for a well-rounded education was ranked as the most important variable of Factor 1. Furthermore, the canonical variate analysis did not show any strong differences between the schools in relation to this aspect.

Parents who were interviewed reinforced the proposition that the provision of a well-rounded education was a very important reason for their choice of a school. The opportunity for their daughters to be involved in a variety of extra-curricular activities as well as receiving a good academic education was a significant influence on choice. A typical comment in this regard was:

"Investigation confirmed that the school curriculum, supported by the staff, was intended to mature the complete personality and character."

(Item 26, School 3, no. 40)

Although there was strong support for the desire for a well-rounded education it was not ranked in the top four choices in responses to Item 25, although for parents from Schools 2 and 5 it was among the first eight priorities. It may be that, in discriminating between the government and private schools, parents saw a well-rounded education

as important. It may be argued that the existence of opportunities for enrichment was an assumed part of the private system and parents therefore placed greater importance on other aspects in their consideration of a particular private school.

Overall, it is considered that parents were strongly influenced to choose the private system in order to ensure that their daughters receive a well-rounded education.

6.2.2 CARING ENVIRONMENT

The desire for a caring environment, which implies some form of pastoral care and individual attention, was listed as a factor in most of the studies cited in the literature review, although it was not highly ranked. In the present study, the factor analysis of all schools ranked it as the second most important variable of Factor 1. The canonical variate analysis, however, indicated that this variable was a major contributor to the separation of schools on canonical variate 2. Parents from School 1 were most concerned with the provision of a caring environment, but for parents from Schools 2 and 3 this aspect was not as important. In Item 25 the expectation of a caring environment was ranked in the top four priorities by parents from Schools 1, 2 and 3 (and ranked fifth for School 5).

There was a strong feeling amongst the interviewees that the government system did not provide a caring environment but that it existed in the private system. In many instances where parents felt that the local government high school could provide a good academic education it was the desire for personal attention and caring that made the difference (Interview nos. 2, 4, 7, 9, 14).

It would seem that parents' desire for a caring environment is of great importance in choosing a private school as opposed to a government school. One parent commented:

"It was very important to find a school with a caring attitude towards its students, where academic performance was not pursued at the cost of developing good social skills."

(Item 26, School 3, no. 35)

The overall feeling of parents concerning the desire for a caring environment is illustrated in this typical comment:

"I feel that in the teenage years it is important the young person develops a sense of individuality and of 'belonging'. I believe this is achieved by a good 'all round' education in a caring environment, where the young person exists as a person, not a number.

(Item 26, School 4, no. 13).

It is evident that parental desire for a caring environment for their daughter's education is a very important influence on choice of a private school.

6.2.3 GOOD COMMUNICATION

Parental attitudes to the importance of evidence of good communications between the school and the parent indicated that this was an important element. The factor analysis of all school results listed good communication as the third most important variable of Factor 1 (see Table 5.11). In the summarized Likert scale responses (Table 5.2), good communication was important in all schools, although it did not rank in the top six items in any of the schools. The canonical variate analysis showed that the importance of good communication was a constituent of the separation of schools on canonical variate 2. Parents of Schools 2 and 3 saw good communication as very important while it was less important to parents in Schools 4 and 5 and, comparatively, least important to parents from School 1.

Parents interviewed were generally conscious of the value of good communication between the school and home. Many saw the private system as being obliged to provide parents with information and being available for consultation at appropriate times. Several parents told of instances where the schools had shown that they had good lines of communication at a time when the parent was concerned about her daughter.

A typical comment concerning the desire for good communication was:

"As a parent it was important that the avenues of communication with teachers be accessible and receptive. I have found this to be so."

(Item 26, School 5, no. 16)

One parent interviewed was not completely happy with the communication between herself and the school. She said:

"The information provided by the school was limited. I wanted to know more than I did know. There could have been more information given."

(Interview no. 12)

An expectation of the existence of good communication between the school and home appears to be an important factor of choice for parents, although it does not seem to be important in differentiating between schools. It may be argued, therefore, that the existence of good communication channels was assumed to exist in the private system and was an influence in parental choice of the private system but not of a particular school.

6.2.4 DISCIPLINE

The expectation of a disciplined environment was a significant variable identified in the literature. The

examination of the ranking of the Likert scale responses placed discipline in the top four scores in four of the schools (Table 5.3). Only School 5 did not rank discipline in the top five elements. The factor analysis substantiated the importance of discipline as an overall ingredient in the choice of a girls' school, although it was ranked as the fourth variable. The canonical variate analysis showed that discipline was an element of the separation on canonical variate 1, being most important to parents at School 4, less important to parents in Schools 1 and 3 and, comparatively, least important to Schools 2 and 5.

In Item 25, where parents prioritized their four reasons of choice, discipline was not ranked in four of the five schools and was only the fourth factor of choice in School 1. An explanation for the difference between the factor analysis and Item 25 might be that although parents considered discipline important and thus ranked it highly in the inventory of statements, it was generally an assumed condition in private schools and therefore other factors were more important as actual reasons of choice. The majority of parents interviewed did not rank discipline as an important consideration, although those who had seriously considered the local government high school noted that the perceived lack of discipline in the government high school was an important consideration. These parents turned to the private system because of their concern about conditions in the government education system.

One parent interviewed summed up the feeling expressed by many. She said:

"I like the discipline. They need to know where they are. It is not as easy to go off the rails in the private system."

(Interview no. 9).

In summary it may be argued that discipline is an influence on choice of the private system. It is considered that there is some variation in its importance between the schools but that it does not hold the same importance as cited in other studies. Other influences were found to be more important influences on parents' choice of a particular school.

6.2.5 HIGH STANDARD OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

Although academic standard received some attention in the studies cited in the Literature Review, it was not highlighted as a major influence on choice in either the studies by Morrison (1983) or Burrell (1981). However Kenway (1987), in her more recent study, listed "academic future" as a consideration of parental choice. In the present study an attempt was made to identify the significance of a strong academic programme and also to identify whether there were any differences between the schools concerning the academic subjects that parents considered to be of major importance.

The analysis of response frequencies placed desire for a high standard in academic programme in the first four items for four of the schools and sixth for School 3. The factor analysis of all schools' results ranked the importance of a strong academic programme as the fifth most important component of Factor 1. The evidence suggests that a desire for a high standard of academic programme is an important consideration influencing parental choice.

However, the response to Item 25 in the survey instrument showed some distinct variations between the schools. Schools 1, 4 and 5 all ranked the desire for a strong academic programme as their first priority, with an accumulated score for School 5 of 21.7 compared to the next highest, School 4, at 16.1. Parents associated with School 2 ranked academic standard as their second priority overall, immediately after family tradition, while only School 3 did not include academic standard in the top four priorities (although it was ranked number 5).

The canonical variate analysis reflected some of these differences, as the importance of a strong academic programme was an ingredient of the separation along canonical variate 1. Parents of students in Schools 2 and 5 considered a strong academic programme as most important, while for Schools 1 and 3 it was not as important and for School 4 it was of least importance. The contradiction in the importance of the academic programme in respect of School 4 reflects differences in the databases used. The canonical variate analysis is based on the responses to all

the Likert scale items whereas the calculation of priority scores is based on the responses to Item 25.

A typical comment expressed by a parent concerning a desire for a high standard of academic programme was:

"This school emphasizes academic achievement. The future survival of my daughter will revolve around being educated to the highest possible level."

(Item 26, School 4, no. 16)

The emphasis that parents who were interviewed placed on the importance of a high academic programme was quite strong, although some parents felt that the local high schools associated with the respective schools could have provided an equally good academic programme.

An examination of the academic subjects which parents considered important in their choice of a school (Table 5.3) supports the conviction that School 5 parents are looking primarily for a strong academic programme. The accumulated priority scores for these very academic subjects were 18.8 and 12.8, compared to the next highest values of 13.7 and 10.3 respectively. Although parents from other schools acknowledged maths and science as important, it was to a lesser degree and was combined with the inclusion of non-academic reasons in their top five priorities.

It is of interest that parents from School 5 had the highest percentage of parents with tertiary qualifications,

which perhaps explains the value they placed on academic standard. School 2, a school which also listed academic standard as very important, is distinguished from the other schools in the nature of the subject areas the parents considered as top priority. The parents considered that variety of subjects is a major consideration and rated languages and academic excellence before the specific subjects of mathematics and science.

It is clear that the expectation of a strong academic programme is a very important influence on parents choosing a private school. It may be that parents of Schools 2 and 5 have a slightly stronger desire for specific subject areas than the other schools but there is no doubt that most parents place great value on the provision of a strong academic programme. This suggests that parents are concerned to see that their daughters are able to compete successfully for places in tertiary institutions and to have the opportunity to enter professions requiring academic qualifications.

6.2.6 QUALITY OF STAFF

The studies cited in the Literature Review noted the importance of staff as an influence on parental choice of a private school. Quality of staff encompasses both the expectation of well qualified staff as well as dedication and stability (in the sense of long-serving) of the staff group. Several studies cited highlighted the importance of

staff in the selection of a school. In the present study this factor was ranked sixth in the factor analysis of the Likert scale responses. However, there was some distinction between the schools in the analysis of the Likert Scale responses to the inventory. Parents from Schools 2, 3 and 5 ranked the importance of staff in the top five with parents from School 5 having the highest agreement score for this item.

The quality of staff did not show up as a major consideration in Item 25, although Schools 3, 4 and 5 ranked staff in the top eight factors of choice. The quality of staff was not one of the more highly ranked variables of either of the two canonical variates.

It appears that the quality of staff was a significant factor of choice for parents, although it was possibly of more interest to parents in School 5. The importance of quality staff was confirmed by the interviews, although parents generally felt that the quality of staff was assumed. In fact it was the principal who was most often referred to as a possible focus of interest. There was a definite feeling that it was the principal who was responsible for ensuring the appointment of quality staff. Parents of School 3 ranked the principal as the third most significant reason of choice in Item 25. One parent noted:

"The dynamic leadership and management of the principal has given us confidence in our decision."

(Item 26, School 3, no. 19)

Another commented:

"The principal shows a lot of professionalism -
she has a very high standard in her expectations."

(Item 26, School 3, no. 9)

It is evident that parents anticipated that quality staff would be found in the private system. It may be argued that parents assumed that quality staff would be present in the school of their choice and placed more emphasis on the principal's ability to attract quality staff. As an influence on choice it is considered that other factors were of greater importance in parents' choice of a particular school.

6.2.7 GOOD REPUTATION

None of the studies cited in the literature review lists good reputation as a factor of choice. The ranking of the responses to the inventory of statements showed, however, that reputation was a significant factor in four of the five schools. The factor analysis of all the schools ranked reputation as the sixth most important variable. The canonical variate analysis did not show any major differences between the schools in attitudes to the significance of reputation.

Item 25 showed the strength of reputation as a factor of choice in that four of the five schools listed it in their

top four reasons while only School 1 did not. Interviewees acknowledged that the reputation of their respective school was a consideration, some indicating that they had reassured themselves through discussions with friends and acquaintances about the qualities of the school.

In relation to reputation and the way a school is viewed in the community it is interesting to note the response to the item concerning parents' attitudes towards the behaviour of students in the community (Table 5.2). There was general agreement amongst parents that this was an important consideration. The canonical variate analysis established that the behaviour of students in the community was an element of separation on canonical variate 2, being most important for parents in School 2 and 3 and least important for parents in School 1.

There is no doubt that the reputation of the school was an important consideration of choice for parents in all schools. Interviewees reflected this finding, although there were subtle differences between the schools in regard to the importance of reputation.

It is considered that, in choosing a school for their daughter, parents are influenced by the way the school is perceived in the community and that the reputation of the school is an important influence on choice by prospective parents.

6.3 SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES ON THE CHOICE OF A PARTICULAR PRIVATE SCHOOL

6.3.1 DISTANCE

Although the literature did not list geographic distance from home to the school as a factor of choice it appears that it may have some influence for particular schools in this study.

The agreement/disagreement scores and the subsequent factor analysis did not reveal that distance was a major influence on choice of school overall. However, for Schools 1 and 4, over two-thirds of parents noted that the proximity of home to school was important. In the response to Item 25, where parents ranked their reasons for choosing a particular school, parents from Schools 1, 3 and 4 all ranked the location of the school in relation to the home (Physical position) in the top four reasons of choice. This finding was supported by the interviews where, in all nine interviews, it was made clear that it was distance which dominated the choice of a particular school. Within the interview group, however, there were two approaches to the influence of distance on the choice of school. Some parents would not, under any circumstances, have contemplated allowing their daughter to travel and made their decision between the local high school and the closest private school. The other group of parents had carefully chosen to live within a certain radius of a

private school in order that it was possible for their daughter to attend.

The canonical variate analysis indicated that the importance of proximity was an important component of the separation on canonical variate 1. Distance was of most importance for parents at School 4, while it was of least importance for parents at Schools 2 and 5. This difference is also substantiated by the interviews, where two students from School 5 and one from School 2 travelled significant distances to reach their school, in the process travelling past other schools. In contrast, several parents from Schools 1, 3, and 4 made it clear that they would have chosen or seriously considered School 5 if the distance had not been considered too great.

It is evident that distance is a powerful influence on choice for parents from Schools 1, 3 and 4. Each of these schools is the only school of its type in the area and students would have to travel a considerable distance to reach one of the other schools. While there is a range in the distance travelled to school, it is most likely that in the cases of these schools they were still the closest private girls' school. In contrast there is evidence to suggest that some students travel significant distances to reach School 5, while School 2 draws most of its day students from a relatively small radius.

Distance from the school cannot be considered an overall influence on choice. However, the data indicate that it is

a very important consideration to parents in the selection of a particular school.

6.3.2 FAMILY TRADITION

The possibility that family tradition might be a factor of choice of a particular school was highlighted in the literature by Dickinson (1981) and Kenway (1987), although both based their findings on assumptions rather than any direct data. The factor analysis of all schools did not highlight family tradition as an important element, which is consistent with the general studies undertaken by Morrison (1983) and Burrell (1981).

The analysis of Item 25 revealed, however, that for parents of School 2, family relationship with the school was the most important reason for their choice of that particular private school. For parents at School 5 it was ranked as the third reason of choice. In contrast, family relationship with the school did not have significance in any of the other schools. The canonical variate analysis substantiates these findings. For parents from Schools 2 and 5 family connection is the strongest variable separating these two schools from the other schools along canonical variate 1. One parent interviewed from School 2 said:

"We looked at another school but we'd already

decided. It was a family tradition."

(Interview no. 12)

These findings are also reflected in the interviews. In particular, parents from both School 2 and 5 indicated that family connection and tradition were important. One student was travelling over 25 kilometres, and past other schools, because of the desire to maintain family tradition. Of interest is the fact that four mothers from both Schools 1 and 4 had attended other private girls' schools and as a result were committed to the private system. They all expressed a sense of loyalty to their old school but had put it aside because the distance was perceived to be too great. In all cases they admitted that if they had lived closer to their old school their daughter would have attended it.

Clearly, there is a definite distinction between the schools in regard to the significance of family tradition. School 2 has the strongest tie to tradition, with School 5 also having strong family ties. School 2 also stands out as the school with the highest percentage of parents having had a private school education (57.5%). The strength of the influence of family tradition for School 2 suggests that there is a stronger loyalty towards the particular school than that experienced by the other schools. For Schools 1, 3 and 4, it appears that family tradition is not a major factor affecting choice.

6.3.3 BOARDING FACILITIES

Each of the schools under review has a boarding house. This aspect, given that it is common to all, was not considered as a possible factor of choice. Nevertheless, for parents of boarders, it is likely that the perceived nature of the boarding facilities will be a major element in their choice. The responses to Item 25 revealed that, for Schools 1 and 2, the boarding facilities were of some significance, ranking sixth and fourth respectively. However, Schools 1 and 2 had higher percentages of boarders responding than the other schools (60.9% and 40.7% compared with 28.2, 20.0 and 15.5% for the other schools). In the open ended Item 26, where parents were encouraged to comment on any other aspect of their choice, several parents acknowledged that their personal response to the character of the boarding facilities and the perceived caring environment had. One mother wrote:

"The house-mistresses seemed considerate, warm and understanding, possibly because they are mothers themselves. It is really more important to us that our children are happy in their boarding situation so they will be able to produce work they are capable of."

(Item 26, School 2, no. 5)

Another parent commented:

"The boarding house atmosphere seemed to give it

the feeling of as close to a home away from home as possible - the leave was more than reasonable - the cubicle/sleeping arrangements were single rooms each (unlike ALL the other schools). Our daughter much preferred this."

(Item 26, School 4, no. 7)

Overall, the boarding facilities could not be considered a major factor of choice overall, although they may be of some significance to parents of boarders in their choice of a particular school.

6.3.4 SIZE OF THE SCHOOL POPULATION

The size of the school population was not identified in the literature as an overall factor affecting choice. The mean agreement/disagreement scores for Item 4 (Table 5.2) ranged from only 2.7 to 3.5, indicating that parents were generally non-committal in their view of the importance of the size of the school population. Furthermore, the factor analysis did not indicate that the size of the school population was an important aspect. However, the canonical variate analysis showed that the size of the school population was the fifth ranked element of separations along canonical variate 2. On this basis, the size of the school population was of some importance for Schools 2 and 3 and of less importance to School 1. In the ranking of priorities in Item 25 (Tables 5.5 and 5.6), only School 3

listed size of school as an important consideration, ranking it number three overall.

The size of the school population attracted attention among the interviewees. Some parents from Schools 3 and 4 were particularly conscious of the contrast between the size of the local government high school and the comparatively smaller size of the private school and indicated that it had influenced their choice.

One mother commented:

"(Government high school) is very popular now but the size is off-putting. You're not noticed unless you're special."

(Interview no. 8)

In the comments to Item 26 one mother from School 3 wrote:

"The understanding that the school did not have plans to increase numbers much more was a consideration."

(Item 26, School 3, no. 39)

All the schools in the study have senior school populations in the vicinity of 700-800, with the exception of School 3 which is smaller. Most large government high schools have populations of at least 1,000 students. Therefore, it may be argued that the comparatively smaller size of the private school had some influence on those parents deciding

between the government and the private system. Parents were concerned to ensure that their daughter received individual attention and assumed this was more likely in a school with a smaller population. However, for those parents who were deciding between private schools, the size of the respective schools was not a particularly relevant consideration.

6.3.5 SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION

Given that all the schools under review are single-sex girls' schools, this feature was not a differentiating factor in distinguishing between schools. Nevertheless, there was evidence that for many parents the single-sex nature of the school was a factor which partly led to their choice of a private school in preference to the government system. Evidence of parental awareness of the advantages of single-sex education was very apparent in the interviews and was also forthcoming in the voluntary comments in Item 26.

It may be argued that the decision to choose a private, single-sex school rather than a co-educational private school or government school alternative was based, to some extent, on a desire to ensure the best possible environment for academic success.

6.3.6 CHRISTIAN ETHOS

The existence of a Christian ethos or moral values was noted as a very important factor of choice in a number of studies (Morrison, 1983; Burrell, 1981; Dickinson, 1981). However, in the present study, although parents generally agreed with the statement that evidence of a Christian spirit was important (Item 10, Table 5.2) it was not in the top nine items for any school. Similarly, Christian ethos did not rank in the top seven variables of the factor analysis, while the canonical variate analysis did not reveal the desire for a Christian ethos was an important element of either of the canonical variates.

In the responses to Item 25 in the survey, only parents associated with School 4 ranked Christian ethos as an influence upon choice (Table 5.6). The interviews supported the lack of importance of Christian ethos, with only one parent (from School 4) commenting on its importance to her. Others acknowledged that they were happy to have their daughter exposed to Christian values but that it was not an important consideration (Interview numbers 4, 5, 6). The presence of a Christian ethos was perceived as "a bonus." A typical comment in this regard was:

"Our choice was prompted also by a fundamental belief in the encouragement of Christian values, although we are not practising Anglicans."

(Item 26, School 3, no. 38)

Despite the religious affiliations of the schools concerned, the evidence suggested that parents do not choose a particular school on the basis of their desire for Christian ethos or religious affiliation. Parents did acknowledge, in several instances, that they themselves had had a Christian upbringing and although no longer committed were pleased that their daughter was being exposed to its values.

However, it should be acknowledged that all schools are non-Catholic and are perceived to represent the Protestant interpretation of Christianity and to support a Christian moral code. It is likely that the religious and moral foundation is seen by parents as commonplace to all schools and therefore not an element of choice between them.

6.3.7 DISTANCE IN RELATION TO A BOYS' SCHOOL

An added dimension to the question of proximity is the question as to whether the close proximity of a boys' school had any impact on the selection of a particular school. The Likert scale responses indicated that there was general disagreement with the statement relating to the importance of proximity to a boys' school (Table 5.2). However, the canonical variate analysis showed that proximity to a boys' school was of some importance to parents of School 1 and relatively of least importance to parents of Schools 2 and 3. Also of interest is the fact

that several parents in School 4 highlighted closeness to a boys' school as important in their own comments in Item 26.

Although there might be a difference between the strength of the schools' response to the significance of the close proximity of a boy's school it cannot be seen as a major factor of choice overall, although it is a consideration to some parents in the choice of particular schools.

6.3.8 "TONE"

"Tone", defined as the feeling perceived to be present in the school, was not identified in the literature as a factor of choice. However it emerged as the fourth reason of choice for parents of School 5 in the ranking of priorities in Item 25 (Table 5.6). Parents at this school commented that it was the general feeling of caring and the provision of opportunities for all which had some influence in the decision making. School 1 also listed "tone" as an eighth factor of choice in this item.

It is evident that "tone" could not be considered an influence on choice for most parents, although it was of some importance to parents of School 5.

6.3.9 NON-ACADEMIC COURSES AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The possible influence of non-academic and extra-curricular activities on parent choice was not noted in any of the literature reviewed. The results of the inventory did not particularly highlight creative arts or sport to be major considerations of choice. However, the level of agreement to Item 14, which explored the importance of music, was quite high for both Schools 2 and 5 (Table 5.2).

Neither the factor analysis, the canonical variate analysis nor the rankings from Item 25 revealed any importance being attached to non-academic or extra-curricular activities. However, those interviewed frequently referred to such activities as sport, creative arts and music as having been strong influences in their choice of the private system. Several were very conscious that their daughter could have gained a good academic education in the government education system but that these extra activities were not necessarily available in the state system.

It is apparent that the desire for a well-rounded education, a factor of major importance in the choice of the private system, encompasses the variables under discussion. It could be considered that it is the availability of these activities which was important to parents and which influenced their decision to choose the private system, but that individually they were not significant factors of choice. With the possible exception of music at Schools 2 and 5 it would seem that there is no

distinctive difference between the schools in their attitude to the significance of non-academic courses and extra-curricular activities.

Although the individual importance of these variables cannot be strongly identified as influences on parental choice of a private school it may be argued that it is the expectation of the presence of extra-curricula activities which attracts parents. In addition, it is evident that the provision of music is of some influence in the selection of particular schools.

6.4 INSIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES ON CHOICE OF SCHOOL

6.4.1 PHYSICAL FEATURES

6.4.1.1. CLASS SIZE: The size of the class was only highlighted as an influence on choice in one study cited in the Literature Review (Tannock et al., 1972). The Likert Scale responses showed that there was a generally high level of agreement to the statement about the importance of small class sizes but it was not indicated as a particularly important element of choice in either the factor analysis or the canonical variate analysis. Interviewees generally felt that reasonable class size was an expected part of the private system.

6.4.1.2 APPEARANCE: The physical appearance of the school and its environs were not identified as significant in the literature review. In addition, the Likert scale responses do not show a strong feeling that the appearance of the school was an important consideration for parents. The attitudes of interviewees indicated that they were not particularly concerned about physical appearance, although there was general satisfaction with the appearance of the respective schools.

6.4.1.3 UNIFORM: The appearance of the uniform was not an influencing factor for the majority of parents. However, to some degree it is possible that the existence of a uniform and the enforcement of it being worn was of some consideration to parents. Several of the parents

interviewed commented on the presence of the uniform being a consideration. In addition some commented in Item 26.

One said:

"We like uniforms, especially leather shoes."

(Item 26, School 4, no. 34)

The results indicate that the appearance of a particular uniform did not have any significant influence on parental choice of a particular private school. However, it is likely that the enforcement of the wearing of a uniform was of some importance to parents in the choice of the private system of education.

6.4.1.4 NATURE OF RESOURCES: The studies cited in the Literature Review did not establish the physical resources of a school as important. In the Likert scale responses to Item 7 it was clear that parents felt their respective school was well endowed with resources. However the importance of resources as an element of choice was not established by any of the various analyses. Interviewees similarly acknowledged that although resources were expected in the school they had, in the majority, not taken more than a cursory interest in them and assumed that they existed.

The main focus of parents in regard to physical resources was a tendency to compare the perceived lack of facilities in the government system and the assumed availability of

resources in the private system. A typical comment on this issue was:

"As a result of apparent overcrowding and poor facilities provided by the government schools we feel, as caring parents, little option was presented to us."

(Item 26, School 4, no. 32)

Another parent commented:

"The boarding house atmosphere and facilities seemed to give it the feeling of as close to a home away from home as possible".

(Item 26, School 4, no. 39)

It may be argued that, for parents choosing between the government and private systems, the expectation that the private system will have better resources is a consideration. However, for those parents deciding between private schools it is assumed that physical resources will be present in the private system and therefore they are not a consideration in their choice of a particular school.

6.5 FACTORS OF CHOICE

The factor analysis indicated that the seven highest ranked variables from the Likert items in the survey which describe parental attitudes to the attributes of all schools were:

1. A well-rounded education
2. A caring environment
3. Good communication
4. Discipline
5. High standard of academic programme
6. Competent teaching staff
7. Reputation

There may, however, be some variation in the degree of importance of these variables within particular schools.

In Item 26 of the survey, however, parents had the opportunity to nominate specific attributes which affected their choice of a school. In response to this item parents indicated a wide range of variables of varying importance (Table 5.5). Within this group of variables there were many which were common to all schools. After subtraction of the common factors, however, the ranking of the more important factors of particular relevance in the selection of specific schools was:

Table 6.1

Items of particular importance in parental selection of specific schools.

School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5
Distance	Family ties	Distance	Distance	Family ties
Boarding facilities	Boarding facilities	Size of school	Christian ethos	"Tone"
	Single-sex	Principal	Close to boys'school	Music
	Variety of subjects	Single-sex	Music	Staff
	Music			Academic strength

It is clearly not possible to give an absolute ranking of the importance of these factors in relationship to the common factors . Without the presence of one factor such as discipline or reputation a factor like family tradition may not have been able to hold sway. Given the acknowledged similarities between the schools, the differences identified as being perceived by parents to be of significance can only be seen to be important in an environment in which the other elements are present.

6.6 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This research has established that there are several influences on choice which dominate parental selection of independent, non-Catholic girls' schools in Perth, Western Australia. In addition, it is evident that there are

certain variables which are only of importance in parental choice of a particular school.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 OVERVIEW

This study sought to identify the factors which influence parents' choice of a particular independent non-Catholic girls' school for their daughter's secondary education. The applicability of variables identified in the literature review as possible factors of choice was tested through the implementation of a questionnaire survey, supported by interviews with parents of new Year 8 students in five schools. Analysis of the data revealed that, although there was some consistency between factors identified in the conceptual framework and those established through the research, some previously unidentified factors emerged. In addition it became clear that, although the schools have significant common ground, there are some specific variables which are of importance to only some schools or which have differing degrees of importance between schools.

7.2 FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN THE LITERATURE

The review of the the overseas and Australian literature revealed a number of factors likely to affect parental selection of schools. The Australian literature, however, was deemed to have the greater relevance to this study in terms of the social, educational and political environments. The factors identified within the Australian

literature as possible influences on choice and which were established also by the analysis of data included:

7.2.1 Discipline

The expectation of a disciplined environment was a strong factor in the literature reviewed and was established as important in the schools studied. However, School 1 parents appeared to be more concerned with discipline, as this was the item with the highest agreement level for this school in the summary of the Likert scale responses. However, it is considered that discipline was an important and expected factor present in all the schools and was not a particularly distinguishing factor between the schools. Discipline was not given high priority by parents when listing the most important considerations of choice of a particular school.

7.2.2 ACADEMIC STANDARD

The desire for a high standard of academic programme was not considered of particular importance in the literature reviewed, although it was acknowledged as having some role. This study has shown that the expectation and demand for a strong academic programme was evident in all schools, although there were some subtle distinctions between the schools, with parents of School 5 being most committed to high academic standards while parents from both Schools 2

and 5 were seemingly more conscious of the content of the curriculum.

7.2.3 CARING ENVIRONMENT

The desire for a caring environment which provided individual attention and emotional support was considered important in most of the literature reviewed and was also strongly placed in this research. Parents from all schools expected their school to provide a caring environment and it was a common factor of choice.

7.2.4 FAMILY TRADITION

The literature did not highlight family tradition as a significant factor of choice, although it was mentioned in two studies originating in Perth (Dickinson, 1986; Kenway, 1987). This research established the importance of family tradition to parents from School 2 in particular, and to a lesser degree parents from School 5. Family tradition was not an important factor for parents from Schools 1, 3 or 4.

7.2.5 QUALITY OF STAFF

The quality of staff was identified both in the literature and in this study as a significant variable. However, there was evidence of a general assumption that the staff

would be of acceptable standard and parents had not investigated this aspect to any degree.

7.2.6 CHRISTIAN ETHOS

The desire for a Christian ethos was an important variable identified in the literature. However, in this study Christian ethos only emerged as an influence on choice for parents at School 4. Otherwise, although it was an influence which parents clearly were pleased to have within the school, it was not something they actively sought.

7.3 COMMON FACTORS EMERGING FROM THE STUDY

7.3.1 A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

The concept of a well-rounded education was not specifically identified in the literature. It was identified in this study as a very significant factor of choice for all schools, as well as being highly significant in each school.

7.3.2 GOOD COMMUNICATION

The desire for good channels of communication between the home and the school emerged as a significant element in the choice of a private school. However, this factor was not

identified by parents in their own list of priorities.

Good communication could be linked, to some extent, with a desire for a caring environment and its importance should be seen as associated with this factor.

7.3.3 GOOD REPUTATION

The significance of the school being perceived as having a good reputation was not identified in the literature.

However, the research identified good reputation as a factor of some importance. In all schools the evidence of a good reputation was a distinctive factor of choice of the private system and of particular schools.

7.4 SPECIFIC FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN THE RESEARCH BUT NOT COMMON TO ALL SCHOOLS

7.4.1 DISTANCE

The literature did not identify distance as a factor of consideration. The factor analysis also did not identify distance as an important ingredient either, but Item 25 clearly established it as a substantial consideration for parents at Schools 1, 3 and 4. This finding was confirmed by the interviews of parents from these three schools. There is little doubt that they chose the particular private school because it was the closest to their residence.

7.4.2 SIZE OF SCHOOL

The literature did not identify the size of a school as a consideration of choice. In this study the factor analysis did not reveal size to be a important element for all schools as a whole. However, for School 3, the size of the school was ranked as the third priority by parents in Item 25. It is of note that this school has a population which is approximately half that of the local government high school. The interviews of parents authenticated this finding, as all had contemplated the local high school and rejected it partly because of its size.

7.4.3 BOARDING FACILITIES

The literature reviewed made no mention of boarding facilities as a factor of influence. As an overall factor of importance it is not highly ranked. However, for Item 25, parents in Schools 1 and 2 ranked the boarding facilities as a significant factor of choice. Both the interviews and open-ended responses to Item 26 supported this finding. Although not a strong factor of choice, it is probable that for these two schools the nature of the boarding facilities was of some significance in parental choice of these schools.

7.4.4 THE PRINCIPAL

The literature did not specifically identify the principal as a factor in the choice of a school, although it did emphasise the expectation of quality staff. The results of this research were similar, except that in School 3 the role of the principal was highlighted by parents in their priorities in Item 25. This result was ratified by the interviews and the open-ended responses to Item 26.

7.4.5 CLOSENESS TO A BOYS' SCHOOL

The literature did not identify closeness to a boys' school as a possible consideration. The results of this research similarly did not establish this variable as an item of importance overall, but it did emerge as a possible consideration of choice for parents of Schools 1 and 4.

7.4.6 "TONE"

Some parents commented that, in relation to School 5 and to a lesser extent to School 1, the atmosphere or "Tone" they perceived to be dominant in the school was an influence on their choice. The atmosphere or "Tone" was explained as a warmth and friendliness combined with a sense of concern for the individual student and is strongly related to the established factor of a caring environment.

7.4.7 MUSIC

Overall, individual extra curricular activities or programmes were not identified as major factors of choice. However, the availability of music was identified as of some importance to School 5 parents and, to a lesser extent, to parents in Schools 2 and 4, and may be of some importance in distinguishing between schools.

7.4.8 DAUGHTER'S DESIRE TO ATTEND A PARTICULAR SCHOOL

The influence of the daughter on the choice of a particular school was not identified in either the literature or the overall results of this research. However, in both Schools 3 and 4 a high percentage of parents suggested that their daughter had had an influence on the decision (73.3% and 74.3% respectively). The interviews supported these results, with parents from these schools stressing that it was their daughters wish to attend which had heavily influenced their decision. In two cases the parents suggested that their respective daughter's had insisted. Although this factor is not strongly established, it is suggested that the opinion of the daughter may well have some influence. The cross tabulation of the responses regarding the influence of the daughter's opinion with the nature of the parents secondary education suggested that where only one or neither parent had had a private school education, the daughters' views were more likely to be taken into account.

7.5 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This research study has established that there are certain factors of choice which are significant in parents' choice of a private school for their daughters. However, it is evident that there are certain factors which are of greater importance to parents in their choice a particular independent, non-Catholic girls' school for their child's secondary education in Perth. The overwhelming impression to be gained from the research findings is that parents are seeking a caring environment where opportunities exist for the student to be exposed to a variety of enriching educational experiences as well as receiving a strong academic education. There emerges from the findings a strong impression that parents who participated in the study were determined to ensure that their daughters had every opportunity to develop as human beings and, ultimately, to be in strong positions to choose careers which would lead to satisfying and rewarding lives.

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APPENDIX 1

Copy of the letter to the principals requesting involvement
in the survey. (Overleaf)



**WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE
OF ADVANCED EDUCATION**

Cnr Stirling Highway
and Hampden Road
Nedlands
Western Australia 6009

NEDLANDS CAMPUS

Telephone (09) 386 0222

«name»*** Unknown field name ***
«school»*** Unknown field name ***
«address»*** Unknown field name ***
«suburb»*** Unknown field name ***

Dear «name2»*** Unknown field name ***

I am writing to request your assistance with a research project which I am undertaking in 1989. The topic of the research is:

"An analysis of the reasons for parents' selection of a particular Independent, non-Catholic girls' school for their daughter's secondary education".

I believe that this topic may be of interest to you. With increasing awareness of the need for schools to market themselves effectively, this research will offer useful data for school planners.

In order to draw valid conclusions it is intended to:

1. Issue a questionnaire in early March to a random sample of parents of year 8's who are new to the school.
2. Interview 2 - 3 parents of these students to gain in-depth information about their selection.

The final evaluation will be available for your consideration.

The research will be undertaken in association with Dr Murray Print of the Nedlands campus of W.A.C.A.E who can be contacted on 386 0232.

In anticipation of your co-operation I will contact you next week to arrange an appointment to discuss the sample questionnaire and its administration.

Yours faithfully

Lois Joll

20 February, 1989

APPENDIX 2

Copy of the survey. (Overleaf)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOX

1. What is your relationship with the student?

Mother	[]
Father	[]
Guardian	[]

2. Did you attend a private school for your secondary schooling?

Yes	[]
No	[]

3. Did your spouse attend a private school for secondary schooling?

Yes	[]
No	[]

4. Do you have a tertiary qualification?

Yes	[]
No	[]

5. Does your spouse have a tertiary qualification?

Yes	[]
No	[]

6. How many children do you have?

1	[]
2	[]
3	[]
4 or more	[]

7. What distance do you live from the school (day girls only)?

0 - 5 km	[]
6 - 10 km	[]
11 - 20 km	[]
21 or more km	[]

8. Was your daughter booked into more than one school?

Yes	[]
No	[]

9. If "Yes", how many []

10. At what stage did you decide that your daughter would attend an independent school?

Before primary school []
 During Years 1 - 5 []
 During Year 6 []
 During Year 7 []
 After Year 7 []

11. At what stage did you decide that your daughter would attend this particular independent school?

Before primary school []
 During Years 1 - 5 []
 During Year 6 []
 During Year 7 []
 After Year 7 []

12. Did you visit and inspect other schools before making your choice?

Yes []
 No []

14. In choosing an independent school, which by its nature is fee-charging, did you choose to give priority to education rather than using your financial resources for other purposes?

Yes []
 No []

15. In choosing this school, who had the most influence in arriving at the final decision?

Mother []
 Father []
 Daughter []
 Mother and Father equally []
 Mother, Father and Daughter equally []
 Other (Please state)

Please circle ONE of the five categories when responding to the following statements about the school you selected for your daughter.

Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Undecided (U)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	
1. Close proximity to the school was a major consideration in choice of school.			SA	A	U D SD
2. A family member attended the school which was an important consideration.			SA	A	U D SD
3. The school is recognized as having a good reputation and being of high quality.			SA	A	U D SD
4. The size of the school population was not a significant factor in my decision.			SA	A	U D SD
5. Observing this school's students' behaviour in the community was important.			SA	A	U D SD
6. The physical appearance of the school was not important.			SA	A	U D SD
7. The school appeared well endowed with physical resources such as library, computers etc.			SA	A	U D SD
8. Evidence of good communication channels between parents and the school was important.			SA	A	U D SD
9. The appearance of the uniform did not influence my decision.			SA	A	U D SD
10. Evidence of a Christian spirit within the school was very important.			SA	A	U D SD

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 11. Evidence of caring for the emotional well-being of the student was significant. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 12. An important factor was evidence of firm discipline and an expectation of good behaviour. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 13. Evidence of a strong academic programme was an important factor. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 14. The prominent role of music in the school was a significant factor. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 15. The prominent role of the Creative Arts in the school was not significant | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 16. Please list, in order of priority, the aspects of the school's academic programme which were important to you. | | | | | |
| 1. | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | |
| 17. The reputation of the school for sporting achievement was an important consideration. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 18. Awareness of a competent teaching staff was important. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 19. Evidence of small class sizes was an important factor. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 20. The school's reputation for providing a well-rounded education was important. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 21. Your daughter's views did not influence your decision. | SA | A | U | D | SD |

22.The school was recommended to SA A U D SD
me by someone whose opinion
I value

23.If SA or A apply to Question 22, please state the basis
of the person's knowledge of the school.
(e.g.: an ex student, parent of an attending pupil etc.)

24.The location of the school in SA A U D SD
relation to an independent
boys' school influenced my decision.

Please list, in order of importance, the factors which most
influenced you to select this particular school.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

26.Do you have any other comments regarding your choice?

APPENDIX 3GUIDE QUESTIONS USED DURING THE INTERVIEWS

(Used only when some direction is required)

1. Could you explain your family situation - occupation of parents, number and ages of children?
2. Do you have a tertiary qualification? Spouse? Do you aspire to a tertiary education for your children?
3. In considering a school for your daughter, was distance a factor?
4. Did you inspect the school of your final choice?
Others? What, if any, features were you looking for?
Comparisons? Space? Uniform? Resources? Discipline?
5. Was information readily available from the school? How open to questions?
6. How much did you rely on other people's opinions?
Family? Own observations?
7. How important was the academic programme? Aspects?
Results? Staff?
8. Could you outline your most important considerations?

APPENDIX 4SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS OF FOUR INTERVIEWS

(Interview numbers 1, 4, 7 & 14)

RECORD OF INTERVIEW No.1

FATHER - Businessman, no tertiary qualifications.

MOTHER - Works part-time, tertiary qualifications.

CHILDREN - 2 daughters (1 started in Year 8 and 1 in Year 6 in 1989); 1 son in Year 10.

INTERVIEWEE - Mother.

Q. Do you aspire to tertiary education for your children?

A. If it is appropriate. I was brought up by parents who thought that it was the only thing to do, but being married to someone who is successful but not tertiary educated I can see that it is not a necessity. Nevertheless, I suspect that most people will be tertiary educated in future.

Q. Is there a general tone in the household towards tertiary education?

A. There's an expectation that they'll all go to Teacher's College, University or WAIT. But if (daughter) came to me and said she wanted to go to secretarial school or do an apprenticeship, and I thought it was for the right reasons, I'd be very happy to support her.

Q. In choosing this particular school for your daughters, was the fact that it was a single-sex school important?

A. Yes, I think so. Girls are clearly disadvantaged educationally in mixed situations.

Q. In saying that, what kinds of things do you think disadvantage them?

A. I think boys are more demanding for attention, both from what I have read and from my own observations. I went to a co-ed school and, thinking about it in retrospect, the boys in my classes - particularly in physics and chemistry and maths - very much dominated the teacher's time.

Q. Did many girls fall by the wayside?

A. Often. By the time I got to Years 11 and 12 only a small group of girls were still doing what we would call academic subjects, but we were probably 50/50 at

the beginning. No doubt some of the problem was the expectations of the families, where the girl's parents thought that the girls should go out to work by the time they were 16. But I think a lot of them could have gone further if perhaps the teachers were less inclined to think that boys did maths and physics and girls did biology and whatever else.

Q. In choosing a fee-paying school for your children, was there a financial consideration? Did the paying of fees cause you to limit other aspects of your life?

A. I think so. I think that compared with our peer group we made a considerable sacrifice to send our children to private schools. It's not something I would ever resent, but we don't have overseas holidays. We've had children at private schools for 8 years now and simply regard it as an allocation of our resources. Certainly, we have a less "consumer" life than people with only one child at a private school or with their kids at the local government school, but there are things that I am happy to do without.

Q. What was the basis of your decision to send them to a private primary school as well?

A. It's quite complex. The eldest two were going to (government primary school), but (son) had a disastrous year with one teacher who I didn't like and I found myself coming against an attitude of "if you don't like

it, too bad". They were also splitting grades and it didn't seem to matter a bit what the parents thought. It was a decision made by the Education Department and imposed from the top. That was my first inkling that I didn't like this too much. So we went to see (boy's private school) and (son) was able to go into Year 3 and he has been very happy there ever since. I've been generally happy about him being there too. Even when problems have arisen, they've been co-operative and friendly, with a "lets work it out together" sort of response, rather than the defensive sort of responses I got from the Education Department.

(Daughter) started at (government primary school) and was happy enough to stay there when we moved to the other end of Nedlands. But then the school changed the rules about siblings being able to attend no matter where you lived. This would have meant that we had kids at three different schools, so rather than move (daughter) to (another government primary school) for a few years to have the two sisters together we put her into (School 2) as she was booked to go there anyway. But behind it all I guess was a notion of accountability.

- Q. And now you have swapped them again? Can you elaborate on why? What does (School 5) have that (School 2) does not?

A. It doesn't have a lot of tension, snobbishness, overdressed mothers and children or smart cars - I just love it because it's relaxed. I've only been there for 8 weeks, but there seems to be a more unpretentious, pleasant, friendly sort of atmosphere there than I ever got at (School 2). But I think the main problem at (School 2) was that the primary school teachers were unsuitable. They had been there for years and some of them were teaching the daughters of women they had taught. Maybe that's not wrong, but they weren't even changing the grades they were teaching. The grade 1 teacher had been there for 30 years and she was still teaching grade 1. There was the odd committed teachers who I really liked and who wouldn't give you a defensive response, but basically I wasn't happy.

Also I felt they weren't doing enough for my eldest daughter, who's pretty average academically but a nice person. It wasn't enough to be nice or to be good at things other than academic subjects. Both girls are left-handers and they have really struggled with writing but no-one gave them any extra help. I got a whole lot of literature from the Ed. Department and gave it to the girl's teachers, but it didn't make any difference. I still got notes in their reports saying that they must improve their neatness. Another thing I was unhappy with was the Principal. I don't dislike the woman, but she just seems to me to be an anachronism. She's been there for 23 years or so and I just feel that in this day and age that our girls are

going to meet many challenges and that they need strong, positive role models.

- Q. In choosing (school) you obviously looked at some of the things you have just talked about, but were there other things you felt (school) could give the girls?
- A. I think I liked the feeling that they would foster any skills which the girls had - whether it be academic, sporting, drama, music or whatever. I talked to lots of mothers whose judgement I trusted and the general opinion seemed to be that they consider the girls first. They search for an area in which the girl could excel and encouraged her so that there was always something that every girl could do well, even if she couldn't handle the strictly academic subjects. They seem to want to produce a well-rounded, socially responsible child, which is very important to us.
- Q. Did you inspect the school before making a final decision?
- A. I went to the Open Day and loved it. I thought it was very interesting - well presented and extremely well organised.
- Q. Were resources such as the library, science laboratories or computing facilities important to you?
- A. Not the most important.

Q. What kinds of things then were important to you?

A. For me mostly it was the feeling I got back from the staff and the general atmosphere. I think schools can be good without huge libraries and lots of computers and things, although obviously they are important. The Orientation Day with (daughter) was just wonderful. I thought the people did their jobs in a very professional way and the girls who took us on guided tours were all on the ball and knew what they were doing. For me its the feeling - the whole tone of the place.

Q. What about the physical appearance, classrooms, uniforms and suchlike?

A. I used to think they were important. I chose (School 2) on things like that but I don't think they're important anymore. (School 5) has a charming building and a lovely view, but I really wouldn't care where it was.

Q. What about communication from the school to the parent?

A. It's a bit hard to say at this stage. (Daughter) has a homework diary, but she hasn't had any homework so far this term. That's puzzled me a bit, but I'm holding my fire to see what's happening and then maybe I'll raise it at the parent interviews next term. I'm giving her

time to shakedown and then I'll go and ask a few questions.

Q. What about pastoral care? Have you had any opportunity to get a feeling for this?

A. No, not really. There hasn't been any need particularly. (Daughter) is getting on well with her tutor and learning to adjust to a new set of friends. She still hasn't found a niche though, but I'm giving her lots of support and we've got our fingers crossed.

RECORD OF INTERVIEW No.4

FATHER - Engineer

MOTHER - Primary Teacher.

CHILDREN - 2 daughters, 1 at primary, 1 in Year 8 .

GENERAL - Living in a new home near the river. The father had a private school education. The mother attended a government high school.

INTERVIEWEE - Mother.

Q. In coming to the decision on a private school - who instigated the process?

A. My husband felt very strongly that he wanted it - I really didn't mind.

Q. Do you have a private school background?

A. No - my husband does. He felt that there was more care shown. The school was more accountable to the parents. He'd had a very happy time - has maintained contact with friends, goes to the Old Boy functions. He feels he gained a lot. I had a good grounding at (government

high school). I would have been happy for the girls to go there. However, in our marriage we'd always worked things out. He felt so strongly.

Q. (Government high school) was not a negative experience?

A. Definitely not.

Q. What about the single-sex aspect?

A. I'd done some reading about it. My research showed girls do better academically in a single-sex school. Boys dominate the maths and science in the government system - girls not liking to be seen as superior. Our eldest is very young but coming from an all girl household - I could see her fitting that mould.

Q. You didn't find that at (government high school)?

A. I wasn't aware of it at the time - but I now realize possibly yes. But it came from my family as much as anything. I wasn't good at maths.

Q. You did primary teaching. What about your husband?

A. My husband had a few years in limbo. One of the negative aspects of the private education was that he felt very accountable to his parents - he didn't do well - he had to re-do his leaving to get into Civil

Engineering - he's now qualified. There's an enormous pressure to perform.

Q. What about your girls?

A. We feel it is different parenting.

Q. Would you say you aspire to tertiary education for your daughters?

A. Yes - it is a goal.

Q. In choosing a private school why (school)?

A. I felt strongly that they should identify with the local community. I didn't want them to have to travel for hours each day - local identity is very important. There was a group of girls going from the local primary so it was very comfortable for them.

Q. Did that aspect take priority? Did you look at other things?

A. They were also booked into All Saints but I couldn't get them in there. I had an open mind - the choice was (school) or (government high school). We had an interview with the Headmaster at (government high school). What bothered me was the opening of boundaries - the school was running at maximum capacity. (Daughter) was so young. I didn't want such

overwhelming size. I was a little worried about the unit curriculum. When we went to (school) for our interview the school was 'ticking over smoothly.' I was impressed with the way the Headmaster did the interview through our daughter. He was seeing whether we'd let her answer - finding out a lot about us. (Government high school) was so big - it had expanded a lot - size was a big consideration.

Q. Would you rank the academic aspects similarly?

A. Yes - our daughter would perform as well at both schools. She is a conscientious student. She may come out of (school) with a stronger self concept.

Q. Did you seek evidence of academic success?

A. A teacher at the primary school had taught there - and was very positive. Any parent I came across I grilled - I had every confidence it was a good school - people talk. I didn't go to any other college to compare.

Q. What about resources and facilities? How important were they?

A. Obviously I liked the guarantee that class size would stay small. I liked the fact that if things did get out of hand we could change school - couldn't do it the other way - doors would be closed. When we were shown

through the school I felt the facilities were excellent.

Q. Were you looking for any particular thing?

A. I thought it offered a good range of things - I didn't look for computers - my husband did - he was interested in what they had. I looked at sporting facilities. It's important those five years are happy. I did a lot of sport. I wondered at (government high school) how often the kids got to use the facilities.

Q. You were looking for an organized base?

A. I've been a little disappointed - most of the sport is before school or after. Any sport is voluntary. They have Phys. Ed. but all else is extra. The Year 8^s have taken a while to cotton on.

Q. Were fees a consideration?

A. Most definitely. A big consideration. But there are not many things in life you can offer them in terms of buying - what you consider best. It's a big cut-throat world but we were both prepared to work hard.

Q. In terms of the school, was information readily available?

A. I must admit I kept asking for a note at the end of the week - but there's only a monthly bulletin. There

definitely is an enormous communication difference between primary school - but I feel comfortable with this.

Q. Were you happy with the answers to your questions?
Were there any gaps?

A. There were gaps. Finding out about sport and extra-curricula.

Q. In first term how did she settle in?

A. We were pleased. Yes - It was made easier because she went with a group from primary school. At orientation camp she broadened her horizons. The transition for her was very easy. By nature she's very self-sufficient - she's used to coping, she's happy by herself.

Q. In terms of pastoral care - were you looking for this?

A. Most definitely that was a big plus for (school). Not much evidence of this at (government high school).

Q. What about religion? Was Christianity important?

A. I felt - as a family we're not Church goers - we'd neglected it - I wanted them to be exposed in a meaningful way. She complains about having to go to Chapel, but at least I feel she knows what it's all

about. Maybe - I don't want to be involved on a weekly basis - as a child I went to church - I felt it was very positive.

Q. Were social things important? The tone? Girls? Groups?

A. Yes. Well, I knew they'd arise - I feel we've got a strong, close knit family - (daughter) can talk to us - so she knows her limits. She feels secure, a little frustrated. She's coped with the difference. She was concerned at Easter time that she wouldn't be able to give any Easter eggs to the girls in her class. Someone had brought in a whole crate. We talked about giving and how it doesn't change you. A family is the most important influence - if you've got a strong base to work with!

Q. She copes?

A. Yes. The parents are the base builders.

Q. As a couple - do you anticipate becoming involved?

A. I've been reasonably involved in their primary school. I made a conscious decision to be an observer. Attend the Mothers' Auxiliary in an informal way. I don't want to be involved - fund raising - it makes me angry. We pay our fees. I want our daughters to see us involved. I like to know what is going on - you can't scream and shout unless you know what is going on.

Q. When you were looking at the school, did you consider the staffing - the stability or the qualifications of the staff.?

A. No. I assumed, perhaps its naive - I haven't considered it. So far we're happy. I was impressed with the Principal - he sold the school.

Q. What about T.E.E. results? Did you ask?

A. No - although I was generally aware of what they were like. There was the opportunity to ask though.

Q. Could you rank the most important factors?

A. My husband was the main decider, so I don't really think we considered the details too much. With his family background it was just an assumption that (daughter) would go to a private school.

Q. Did this affect you?

A. Well, it gave me a feeling of confidence in the decision. I could see him almost shudder when we visited (government high school). I'm happy with the choice, although I could have coped with the other.

Q. After five years of schooling, what do you hope (school) would have done for your daughter?

A. The end product I hope will be a person who has a positive self-image. She will have tasted a degree of success and have a well-rounded education. Maybe (government high school) couldn't have offered her all of that - at (school) we will be able to monitor her more closely.

Q. Do you see her future as a feminist - pursuing her own opportunities?

A. Most definitely.

RECORD OF INTERVIEW - No. 7

FATHER - Professional.

MOTHER - Public service; degree.

CHILDREN - 2; 1 son (age 10), 1 daughter (age 13).

GENERAL - Live in comfortable home in northern suburb.

INTERVIEWEE - Mother.

Q. Why did you choose this school?

A. We both believe in single-sex schooling. From my reading I thought that the evidence was there to support single-sex schooling - that was my feeling. The size of the school appealed to my daughter - that was important. She only had one friend who went with her to (school).

Q. Will you send your son to a private school?

A. That's the catch - I have real problems with boys in private schools. I think they do better in co-ed schools. The other thing I don't like is that it is discriminatory - girls don't necessarily go to a private school, but boys get preference in a family.

Q. What other factors beside single-sex were important?

A. The distance. Having just moved to this area, we didn't want her bussing. She's got a good friend going to (School 5), but I wouldn't consider it because of the distance.

Q. Did friends influence you in making the decision?

A. It helped. But it was more (daughter's) insistence that made the difference.

Q. Did you inspect the school?

A. Not really. I think we got the last place. It was late last year. (Daughter) wouldn't go to the Orientation Day at (government high school). She said there was no point. She is a very assertive girl; she knows her own mind.

Q. When you looked at the school, did you have any idea about what you were looking for?

A. Mainly I was concerned not to find pretty young girls. I was looking for a focus on science and maths - that was there - and a caring attitude. That has come through. I didn't look for academic excellence. It was a feeling - it had to feel good.

Q. Were you able to get a staff profile?

A. It was mentioned - but I guess I assumed that the staff were okay. I knew that they were strong in drama. The recent parent/teacher night was reassuring.

Q. What else were you looking for?

A. I was looking for smaller classes than the government system offers and a caring attitude. Then there's a philosophy - a religious, established, philosophy which you don't get in the state system unless you're incredibly lucky.

Q. Did you expect the staff to give more than in the state system?

A. Yes. The school would demand more - based on Christian principles - a basic commitment of all staff.

Q. What about extra-curricular activities?

A. No. I think a lot of people go overboard on this. She's in a few things, but she would have been in those anyway

Q. What about physical resources?

A. Resources were not an issue. It's nice to be taken through a room of computers, but I wasn't looking for

it. I've always been a person who's accessed resources when I need them.

Q. What did your husband feel?

A. He was more resistant than I was. He was not keen on a single-sex school, but he capitulated to my wider reading. I wanted her to have the option of maths/science - to be exposed. It was a difficult process.

Q. Do you have aspirations for her to go on?

A. Yes. I was a mature age student for seven years. She's had a mother going to Uni. She's told us she's planning to do medicine.

Q. Were you happy with the communication from the school?

A. Yes - they have been good. We had one muck up which they retrieved. They seem particularly well organized. The parent/teacher night was good. There is no sense of elitism either; that was a relief.

Q. Five years on, what do you hope that your daughter will have got out of (school).

A. Self-esteem, which obviously you get from home as well. But a system which hasn't put her down. A view that she could do whatever she wanted if she put her mind to

it. Following that she could make reasonable choices. I also hope that she would get a sense of community and caring.

I perceived that (school) would be the least elitist because it was started by Anglican nuns. I wasn't pleased to find out that their brother school was (boy's private school) - I never liked it.

I had a friend at (School 2). It seems that there were fabulously wealthy people there. If you weren't like that you had a chip on your shoulder - that was a negative. My friend has, in a sense, been apologizing, yet she is following the family tradition. She believes things have changed.

RECORD OF INTERVIEW - No. 14

FATHER - Accountant

MOTHER - Working (unskilled)

CHILDREN - 2 daughters (younger still at state primary); 1
son (attends local government high school.)

GENERAL - Live in a northern suburb

INTERVIEWEE - Both parents present at interview.

Q. Did you have the girls booked in elsewhere?

A. No - we wouldn't have contemplated the travel. When we booked them in there was no other alternative private school available. If we had lived near (School 5) they would certainly have gone there, because I'm a member of the Old Girls' Association. As a boarder I saw day girls coming at early hours of the morning - but who wants to spend their life travelling to and from school.

Q. Having decided on this school, were there things that you were looking for? Academic strength, perhaps?

A.

F. No. I don't think they do better academically. Distance was the main factor. As long as it's a private girls' school, it doesn't have to be a continuation of the same school.

M. I had five years as a boarder - it makes you stand on your own two feet. The things you learn there I think help as a character. Also, I'd seen girls going to (government high school) - I didn't want my girls to look like that.

F. I think discipline, not some sort of social thing is important. People shouldn't send their children to an expensive school for social reasons but to give them discipline - the best possible conditions to learn.

Q. Did you feel that religion was important?

A.

F. I'm a Catholic. My first impression of (school) is that it is still holding onto values of the past. Values that aren't really Australian.

M. We didn't believe in starting them before high school. They had to go through the state primary school first. (Son) was head boy at (government primary school) and (daughter) was head girl. Some girls I know who left primary school before Year 7 found the last year at the private school primary section a little disappointing.

Q. Do both of you have a tertiary education?

A.

F. I do.

M. No.

Q. Do you aspire to a tertiary education for your children?

A.

F. Definitely. (Son) is in the "law" stream, (elder daughter) is in the "medical". I'm not sure about (younger daughter). I ask them to set their goals fairly high. (Elder daughter) knows how to work. If they don't get the best out of her we'd pull her out. She's a level eight gymnast and has always topped the class.

Q. What other areas are important?

A.

F. No particular areas, although there is no unit curriculum. We had an interview with (principal) and looked over the school.

Q. Were there things that you looked for in inspecting the school.

A.

F. Not really, although the architecture is poor - very British in style with no hint of Australian.

M. They have a lot of land, yet all the buildings are crowded.

Q. What about class sizes?

A.

F. They're O.K. - but its a question of finance really. There are some classes of 28.

Q. Has your daughter pursued her gym there?

A.

M. No - we felt if anything she was ostracized. Because of the state gym trials she couldn't go to the Year 8 camp and the teachers certainly let her know that, of the whole 135, she was the only one who didn't go. They didn't set her any work, she was left alone and no-one checked if she was there.

F. Appalling! They weren't used to that - someone not going. She was very disappointed at the way she was treated

Q. With distance being the prime factor, did you consider (government high school)?

A.

F. Not really. If you didn't accept the place, you'd have no second chance.

Q. What impressions did you have of the school before?

A.

M. We had friends with daughters there. They were happy, but we didn't think about it a lot.

Q. What did you know about the staff?

A.

F. I'd like to know more about the qualifications of the staff.

Q. Was information readily available?

A.

M. We didn't get around to discussing it. (Principal) was more interested in talking to (daughter).

F. We could ask though.

M. (Daughter) was very happy with the interview, although on orientation day she wondered if she had done the right thing. We have a friend who pulled out on orientation day.

Q. What about pastoral care?

A.

M. It seems good - the tutorial groups work well. She has friends in gym too.

Q. Do you anticipate being involved in the school?

A.

F. No. I was stunned at the P & F. No criticism of the individuals, but I was not impressed. At (government high school) where (son) goes, we have a series of committees in which the parents are more involved

Q. Would you have been happy for (daughter) to go to (government high school)?

A.

F. Absolutely!

M. I didn't consider anything else. (Daughter) said straight out that she wouldn't go to (government high school).

Q. Were fees a consideration?

A.

F. Yes. But we made the decision to send her and don't envisage it as a major problem. (Wife) is working too. Even so, we also have \$2000 a year in gymnastic fees and 9 years of school fees to go, so I'm sure we'll want a bit.

Q. What would you hope (daughter) will get from (school)?

A.

M. I hope that she will come out confident - good T.E.E. and having consideration for others.

F. It's often what school you went to. Even if you get straight A's at University, you're still not considered as good as the guy who went to (private school). The system perpetuates that, but it's a reality in the workplace.

Q. What about extra-curricula?

A.

F. It's very narrow.

M. The choice of languages is very poor - typically classic - with no recognition of Asian culture. Some people we know pulled out at the last minute because it didn't have the extra things.